KIRKMAN • OTTLEY • RATHBURN • PLASCENCIA
INVINCIBLE
VOLUME FOURTEEN
THE ULTIMATE WAR

image COMICS PRESENTS

INVINCIBLE™

THE ULTIMATE WAR

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ISBN: 978-1-60706-367-4
INVINCIBLE, VOL. 14: THE VILTRUMITE WAR
First Printing

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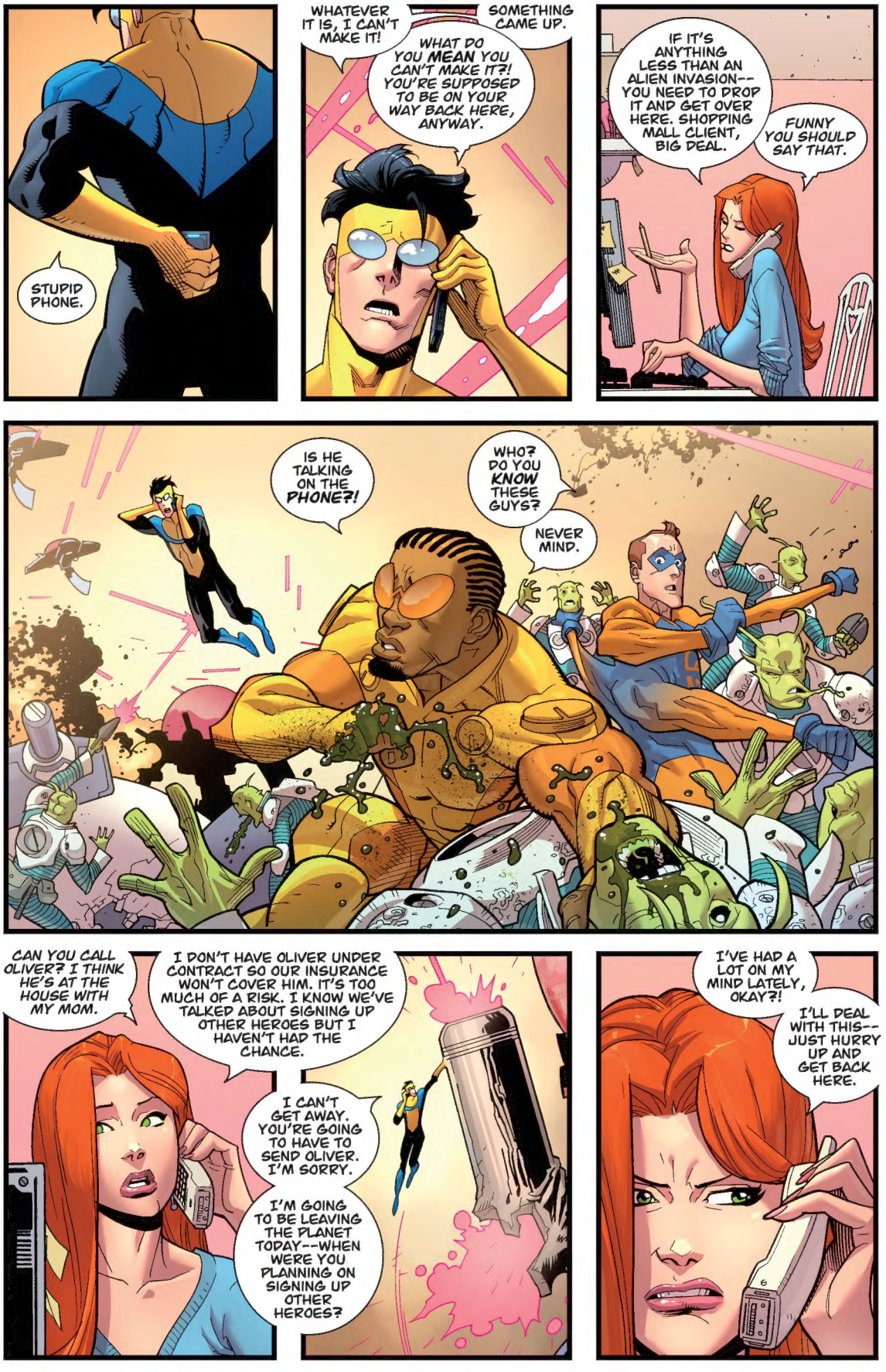
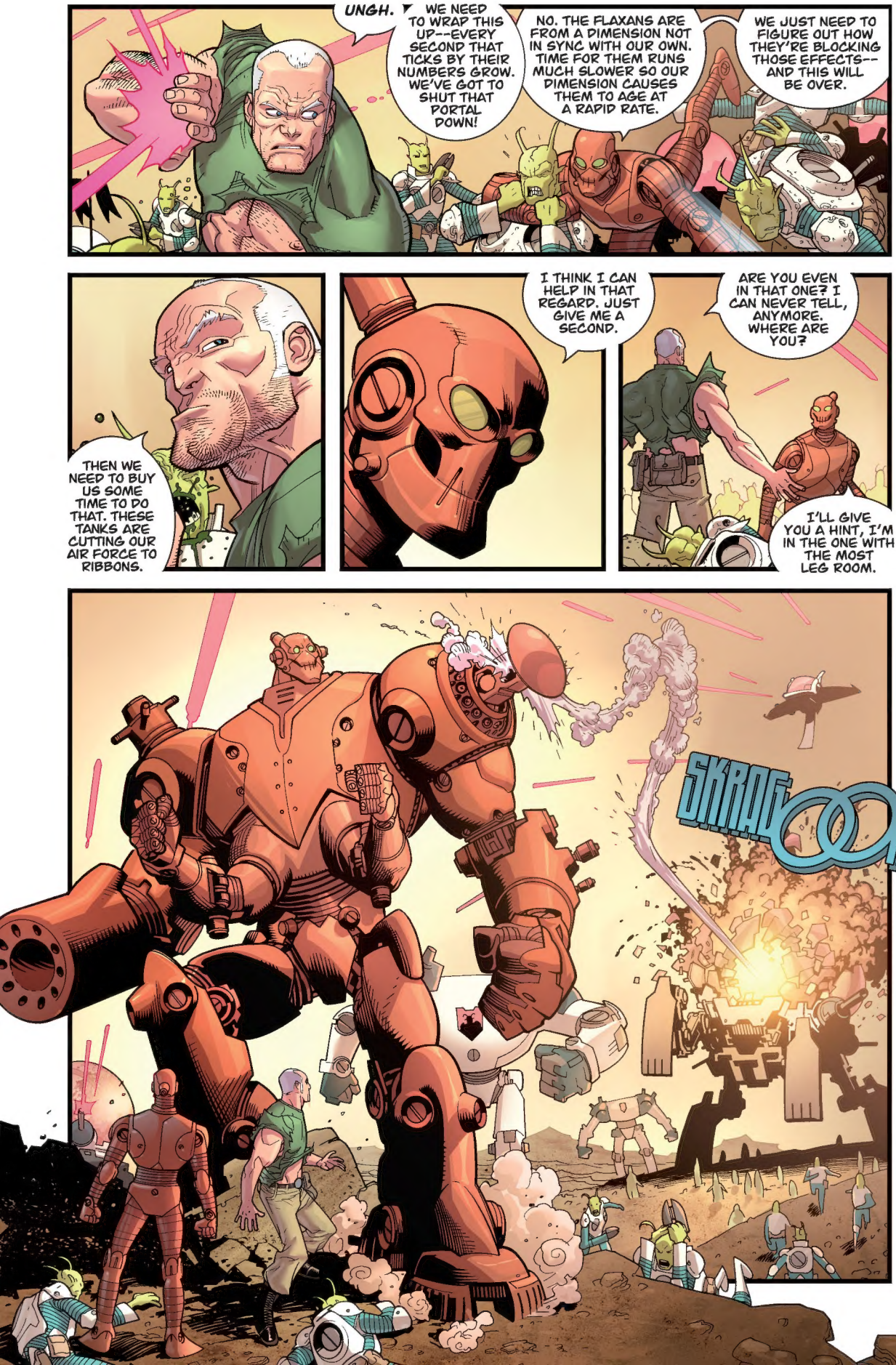
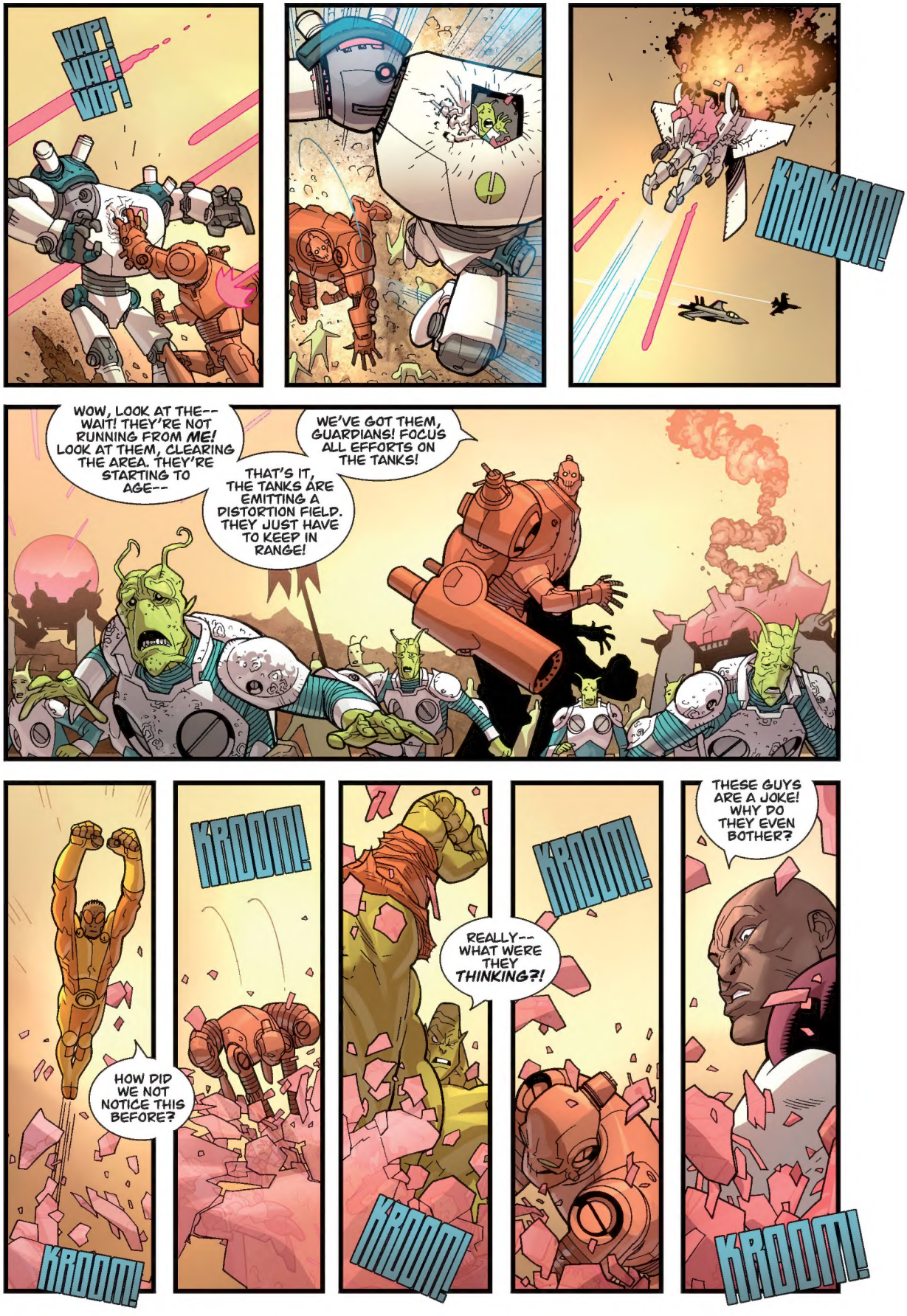
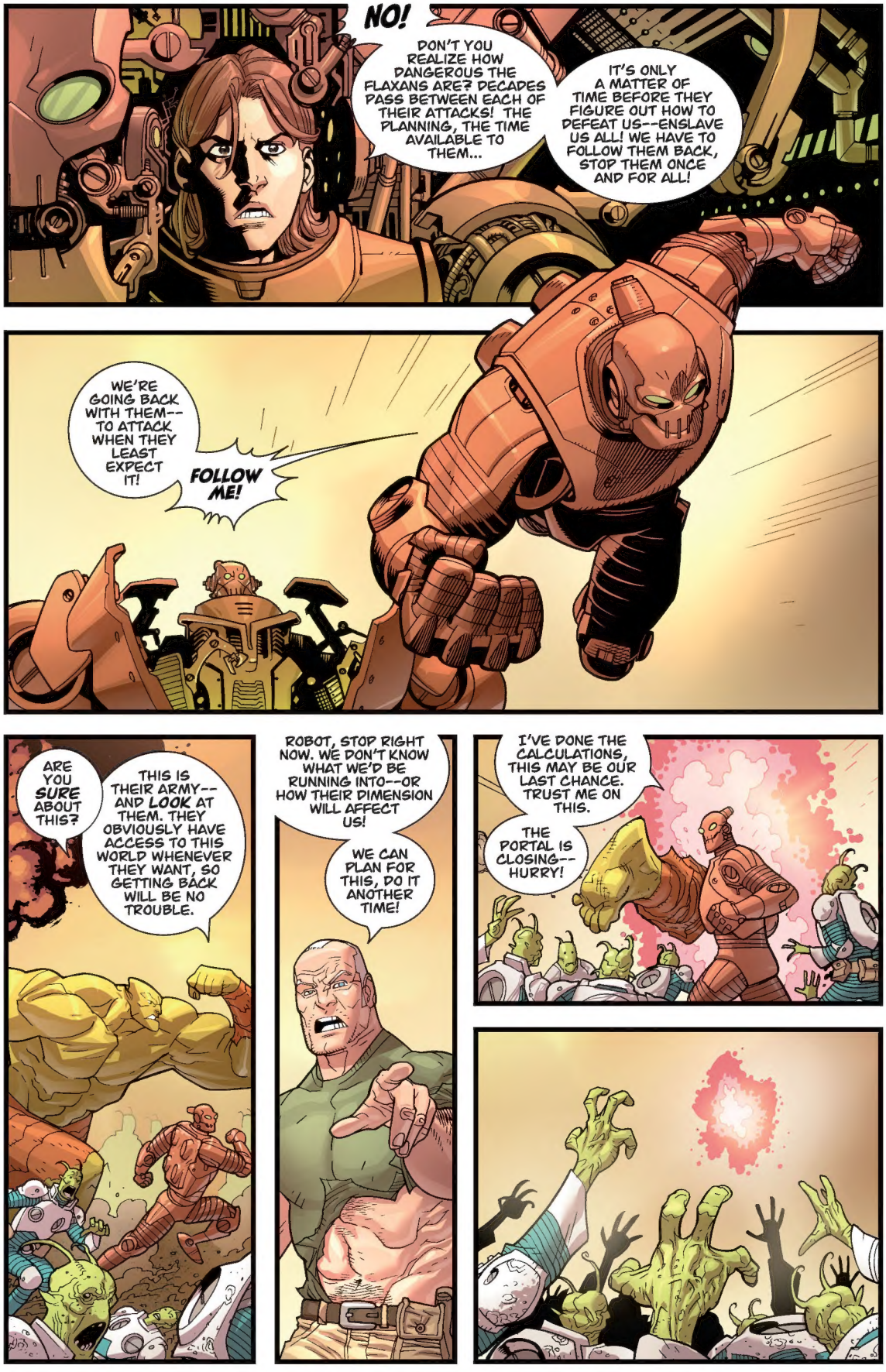
CHAPTER ONE
RYAN +fco

BREET!
BREET!
YOU'RE KIDDING ME!


STUPID PHONE.
WHATEVER IT IS, I CAN'T MAKE IT!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU CAN'T MAKE IT?! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE ON YOUR WAY BACK HERE, ANYWAY.
SOMETHING CAME UP.
IF IT'S ANYTHING LESS THAN AN ALIEN INVASION-- YOU NEED TO DROP IT AND GET OVER HERE. SHOPPING MALL CLIENT, BIG DEAL.
FUNNY YOU SHOULD SAY THAT.
IS HE TALKING ON THE PHONE?!
WHO? DO YOU KNOW THESE GUYS?
NEVER MIND.
CAN YOU CALL OLIVER? I THINK HE'S AT THE HOUSE WITH MY MOM.
I DON'T HAVE OLIVER UNDER CONTRACT SO OUR INSURANCE WON'T COVER HIM. IT'S TOO MUCH OF A RISK. I KNOW WE'VE TALKED ABOUT SIGNING UP OTHER HEROES BUT I HAVEN'T HAD THE CHANCE.
I CAN'T GET AWAY. YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SEND OLIVER. I'M SORRY.
I'M GOING TO BE LEAVING THE PLANET TODAY--WHEN WERE YOU PLANNING ON SIGNING UP OTHER HEROES?
I'VE HAD A LOT ON MY MIND LATELY, OKAY?!
I'LL DEAL WITH THIS-- JUST HURRY UP AND GET BACK HERE.

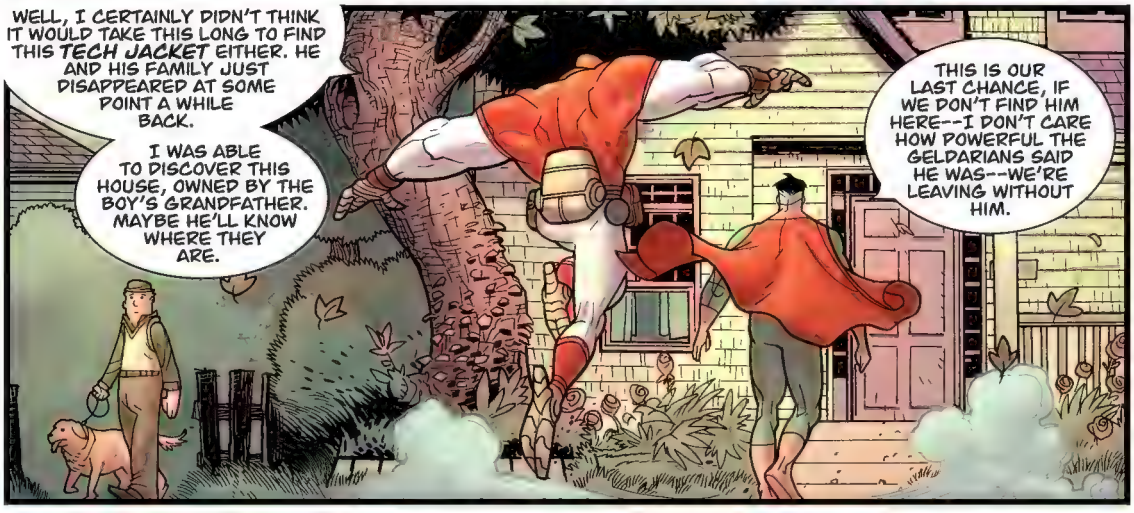

UNGH.
WE NEED TO WRAP THIS UP--EVERY SECOND THAT TICKS BY THEIR NUMBERS GROW. WE'VE GOT TO SHUT THAT PORTAL DOWN!
NO. THE FLAXANS ARE FROM A DIMENSION NOT IN SYNC WITH OUR OWN. TIME FOR THEM RUNS MUCH SLOWER SO OUR DIMENSION CAUSES THEM TO AGE AT A RAPID RATE.
WE JUST NEED TO FIGURE OUT HOW THEY'RE BLOCKING THOSE EFFECTS--AND THIS WILL BE OVER.
THEN WE NEED TO BUY US SOME TIME TO DO THAT. THESE TANKS ARE CUTTING OUR AIR FORCE TO RIBBONS.
I THINK I CAN HELP IN THAT REGARD. JUST GIVE ME A SECOND.
ARE YOU EVEN IN THAT ONE? I CAN NEVER TELL, ANYMORE. WHERE ARE YOU?
I'LL GIVE YOU A HINT, I'M IN THE ONE WITH THE MOST LEG ROOM.
SKRAK OOM!


VAP! VAP! VAP!
KRAKOOM!
WOW, LOOK AT THE-- WAIT! THEY'RE NOT RUNNING FROM ME! LOOK AT THEM, CLEARING THE AREA. THEY'RE STARTING TO AGE--
THAT'S IT, THE TANKS ARE EMITTING A DISTORTION FIELD. THEY JUST HAVE TO KEEP IN RANGE!
WE'VE GOT THEM, GUARDIANS! FOCUS ALL EFFORTS ON THE TANKS!
HOW DID WE NOT NOTICE THIS BEFORE?
KROOM!
KROOM!
REALLY-- WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?!
KROOM!
KROOM!
THESE GUYS ARE A JOKE! WHY DO THEY EVEN BOTHER?
KROOM!


NO!
DON'T YOU REALIZE HOW DANGEROUS THE FLAXANS ARE? DECADES PASS BETWEEN EACH OF THEIR ATTACKS! THE PLANNING, THE TIME AVAILABLE TO THEM...
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY FIGURE OUT HOW TO DEFEAT US--ENSLAVE US ALL! WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THEM BACK, STOP THEM ONCE AND FOR ALL!
WE'RE GOING BACK WITH THEM--TO ATTACK WHEN THEY LEAST EXPECT IT!
FOLLOW ME!
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?
THIS IS THEIR ARMY--AND LOOK AT THEM. THEY OBVIOUSLY HAVE ACCESS TO THIS WORLD WHENEVER THEY WANT, SO GETTING BACK WILL BE NO TROUBLE.
ROBOT, STOP RIGHT NOW. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'D BE RUNNING INTO--OR HOW THEIR DIMENSION WILL AFFECT US!
WE CAN PLAN FOR THIS, DO IT ANOTHER TIME!
I'VE DONE THE CALCULATIONS, THIS MAY BE OUR LAST CHANCE. TRUST ME ON THIS.
THE PORTAL IS CLOSING--HURRY!

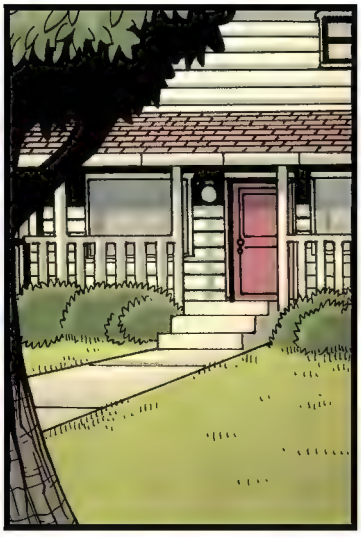
JUST WRAPPING UP NOW. I BARELY NEEDED TO BE HERE. YEAH-- THEY JUST WENT RIGHT IN. THEY'RE GONE. PORTAL CLOSED BEFORE ANYONE COULD FOLLOW THEM. I'M NOT WORRIED, THOUGH. ROBOT KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING.
WHAT ABOUT THAT SHOPPING MALL THING? STILL NEED ME FOR THAT?
DON'T THINK SO. I SENT OLIVER. I'M SURE HE'S GOT IT UNDER CONTROL.
NO!
UNHAND ME!
I WILL RESTORE THE GLORY OF THE LIZARD LEAGUE! I WILL NOT BE DENIED!
DUDE-- SHUT IT!
ANYTHING?
NOTHING. THERE'S NO RESIDUAL ENERGY. WHATEVER SORT OF TECHNOLOGY THE FLAXANS ARE USING TO ENTER THIS DIMENSION, IT LEAVES NOTHING BEHIND.
NOTHING WE CAN TRACE.
OKAY, I'LL BE THERE IN A MINUTE.
ANY CLUE WHEN YOUR DAD IS GOING TO BE READY TO LEAVE?
HE'S BEEN HAVING TROUBLE FINDING TECH JACKET. NO CLUE, BUT I ASSUME IT'LL BE SOON.

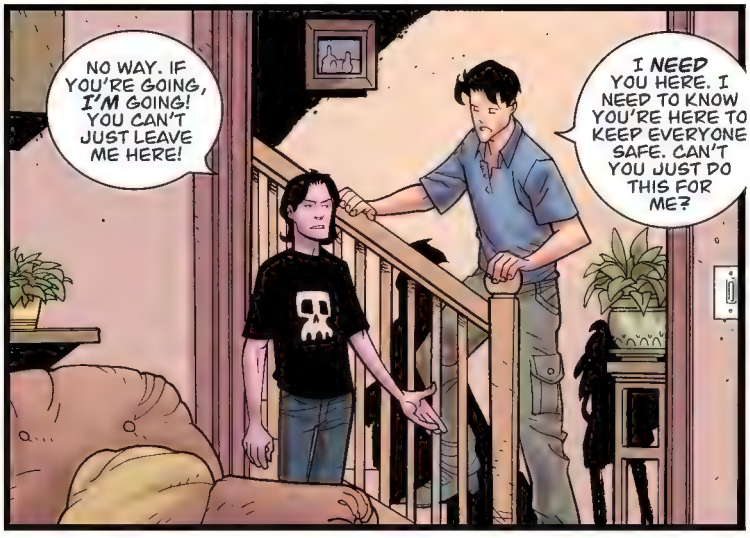
WHAT ABOUT YOUR WIFE? YOU'RE NOT EVEN GOING TO SEE HER WHILE YOU'RE HERE?
I COULDN'T. I WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I'VE PUT HER THROUGH SO MUCH... LET'S JUST FIND THIS BOY AND GET OFF THIS PLANET.
TOO MANY BAD MEMORIES.


WELL, I CERTAINLY DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD TAKE THIS LONG TO FIND THIS TECH JACKET EITHER. HE AND HIS FAMILY JUST DISAPPEARED AT SOME POINT A WHILE BACK.
I WAS ABLE TO DISCOVER THIS HOUSE, OWNED BY THE BOY'S GRANDFATHER. MAYBE HE'LL KNOW WHERE THEY ARE.
THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE, IF WE DON'T FIND HIM HERE--I DON'T CARE HOW POWERFUL THE GELDARIANS SAID HE WAS--WE'RE LEAVING WITHOUT HIM.

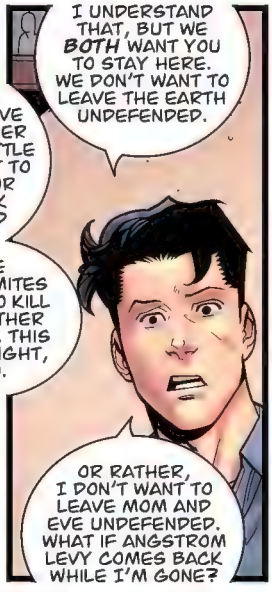
UNDERSTOOD.
KNOCK KNOCK
YOU LOOKING FOR THE THOMPSON BOY? CALLS HIMSELF TECH JACKET? WHAT AM I SAYING--OF COURSE YOU ARE.
HE'S PROBABLY UP IN HIS SPACE STATION. THEY DON'T SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN THE HOUSE.
OUR APPEARANCE DOESN'T ALARM YOU?
SEEN STRANGER, THAT'S FOR SURE...
...AND THE BAD GUYS DON'T KNOCK FIRST.

DO YOU EAT THEM WITH THE SPRINKLES ON THE TOP OR THE BOTTOM OF THE CHIP? I ALWAYS GO SPRINKLES SIDE DOWN-- I THINK IT TASTES BETTER.
SPRINKLES?
THE FLAVOR THINGS--THAT DUST THAT'S ON THE CHIP, YOU KNOW--
BREET! BREET!
WHAT IS IT?!
I DON'T KNOW-- THE LONG-RANGE SENSORS NEVER PICKED UP ANYTHING, THEN SUDDENLY SOMETHING WAS ON TOP OF US!
I DON'T SEE IT ON ANY OF THE MONITORS! WE COULD BE UNDER ATTACK!
HEY, DAD--DID YOU LOOK OUT THE WINDOW?
FRIENDS OF YOURS?
NO, BUT THEY LOOK FRIENDLY ENOUGH. IF THEY CAN SURVIVE SPACE ON THEIR OWN-- THEY COULD HAVE JUST BUSTED IN HERE.
MIGHT AS WELL LET THEM IN.




NO WAY. IF YOU'RE GOING, I'M GOING! YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE ME HERE!
I NEED YOU HERE. I NEED TO KNOW YOU'RE HERE TO KEEP EVERYONE SAFE. CAN'T YOU JUST DO THIS FOR ME?

I'M NOT GOING TO LEAVE YOU AND FATHER TO GO INTO BATTLE ALONE. I WANT TO BE THERE FOR YOU. I THINK YOU'LL NEED ME.
THE VILTRUMITES TRIED TO KILL MY MOTHER AND ME. THIS IS MY FIGHT, TOO.

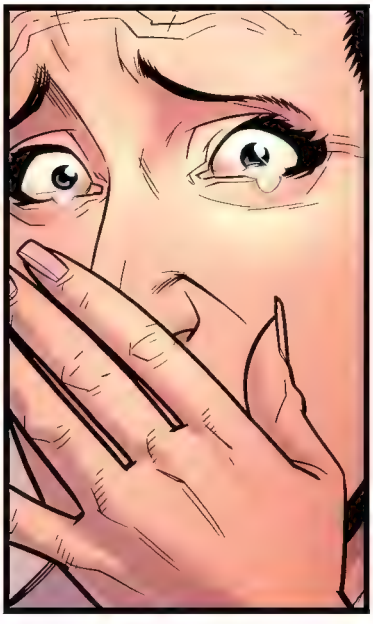

I UNDERSTAND THAT, BUT WE BOTH WANT YOU TO STAY HERE. WE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE THE EARTH UNDEFENDED.
OR RATHER, I DON'T WANT TO LEAVE MOM AND EVE UNDEFENDED. WHAT IF ANGSTROM LEVY COMES BACK WHILE I'M GONE?

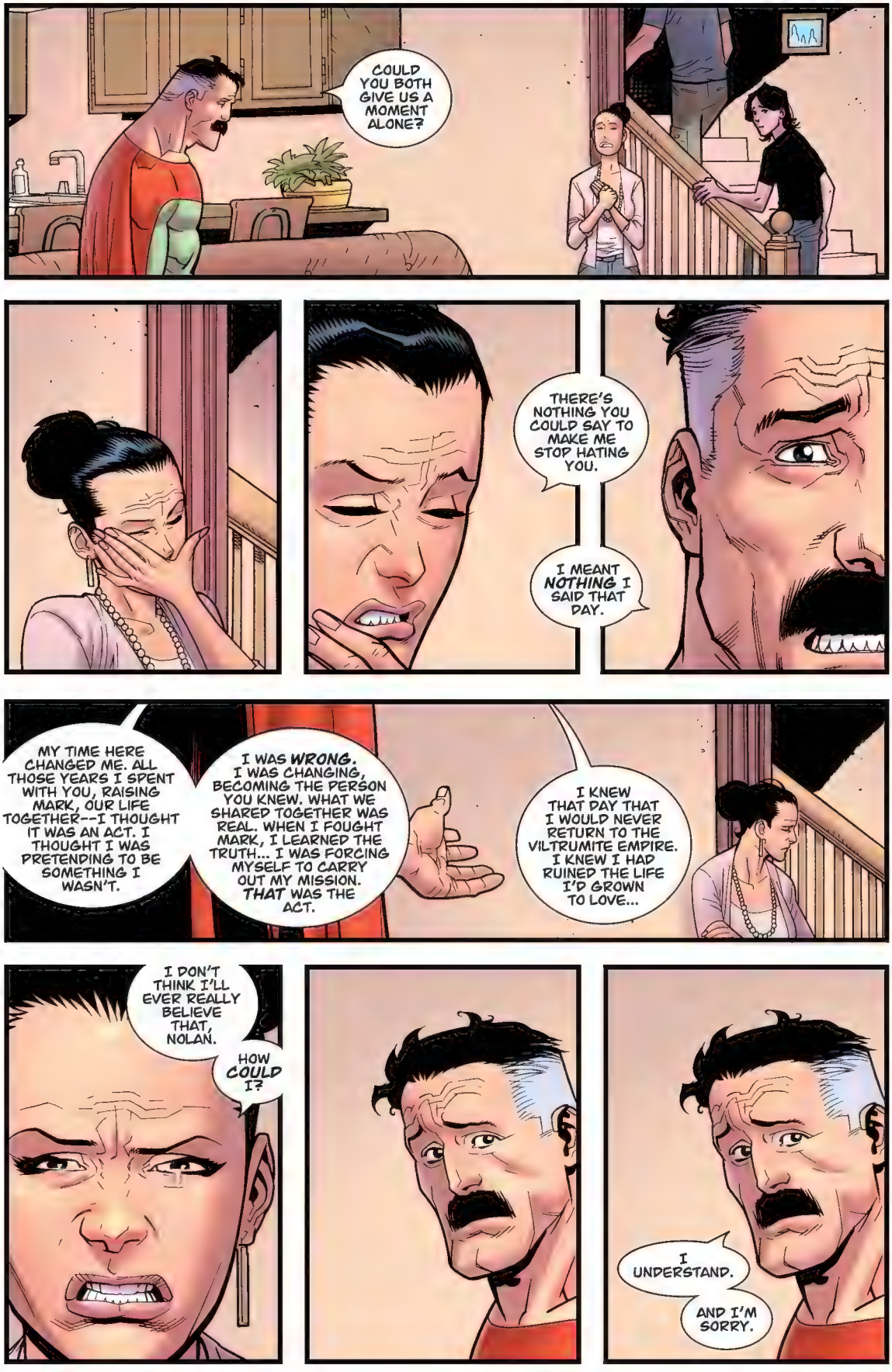
OKAY... THAT I UNDERSTAND.
WHY AM I HEARING THIS FROM YOU? FATHER HASN'T EVEN COME TO SEE ME. WHY HAVEN'T I HEARD THIS FROM HIM?

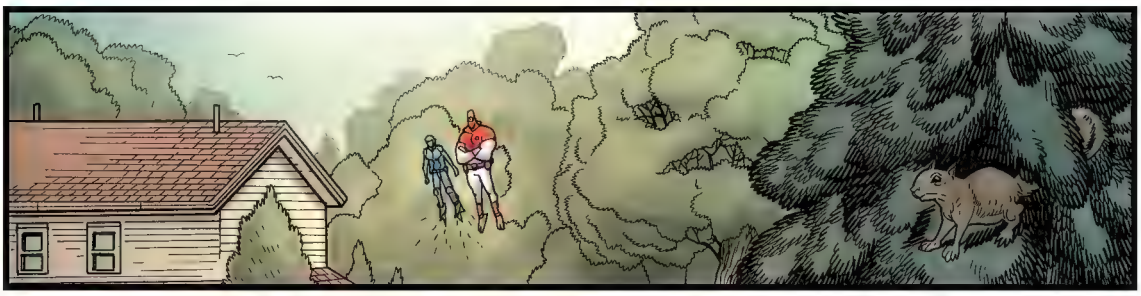
HE'S WORRIED ABOUT COMING AROUND HERE. HE'S NOT READY FOR MOM TO SEE HIM YET. I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO TELL HER ABOUT ALL THIS.

TELL ME ABOUT WHAT?
AND WHO'S NOT READY TO SEE ME?

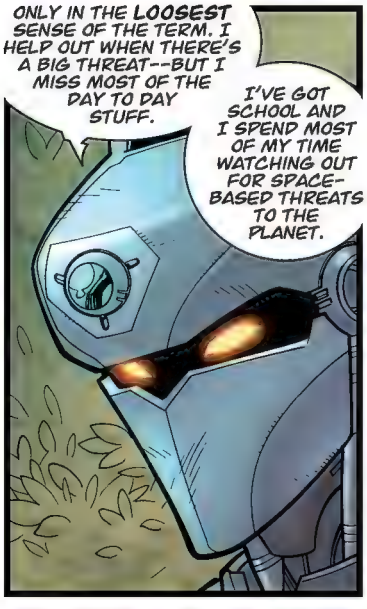
ME.
BUT I'VE SINCE CHANGED MY MIND.

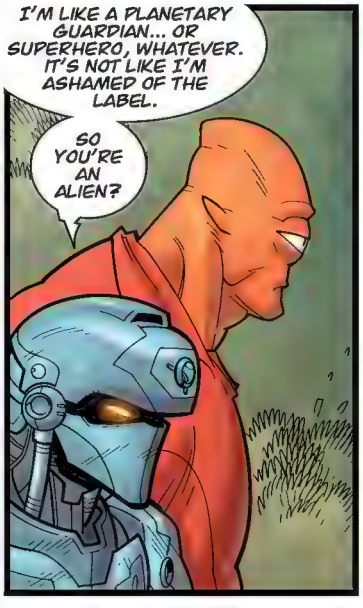



COULD YOU BOTH GIVE US A MOMENT ALONE?
THERE'S NOTHING YOU COULD SAY TO MAKE ME STOP HATING YOU.
I MEANT NOTHING I SAID THAT DAY.
MY TIME HERE CHANGED ME. ALL THOSE YEARS I SPENT WITH YOU, RAISING MARK, OUR LIFE TOGETHER--I THOUGHT IT WAS AN ACT. I THOUGHT I WAS PRETENDING TO BE SOMETHING I WASN'T.
I WAS WRONG. I WAS CHANGING, BECOMING THE PERSON YOU KNEW. WHAT WE SHARED TOGETHER WAS REAL. WHEN I FOUGHT MARK, I LEARNED THE TRUTH... I WAS FORCING MYSELF TO CARRY OUT MY MISSION. THAT WAS THE ACT.
I KNEW THAT DAY THAT I WOULD NEVER RETURN TO THE VILTRUMITE EMPIRE. I KNEW I HAD RUINED THE LIFE I'D GROWN TO LOVE...
I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER REALLY BELIEVE THAT, NOLAN.
HOW COULD I?
I UNDERSTAND.
AND I'M SORRY.

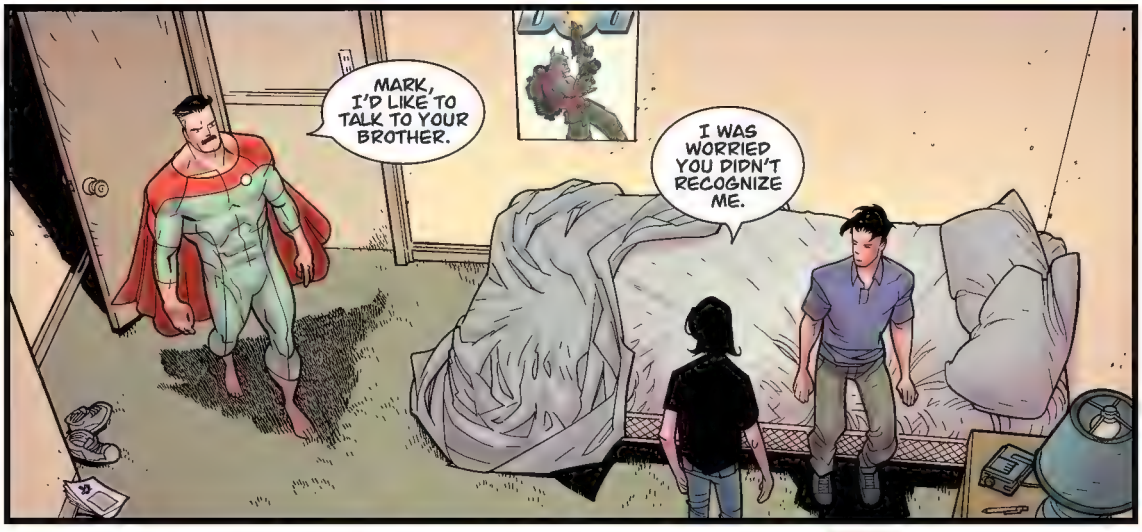


SO, UH... WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG? WHAT ARE THEY DOING IN THERE?
NOLAN MUST HAVE SEEN HIS WIFE, EX-WIFE... ESTRANGED WIFE-- WHATEVER. IT COULD BE A WHILE. THERE'S A LOT OF ISSUES THERE.
SHOULDN'T BE TALKING TO YOU ABOUT THIS... UH...
...SO, YOU'RE A SUPERHERO?


ONLY IN THE LOOSEST SENSE OF THE TERM. I HELP OUT WHEN THERE'S A BIG THREAT--BUT I MISS MOST OF THE DAY TO DAY STUFF.
I'VE GOT SCHOOL AND I SPEND MOST OF MY TIME WATCHING OUT FOR SPACE-BASED THREATS TO THE PLANET.


I'M LIKE A PLANETARY GUARDIAN... OR SUPERHERO, WHATEVER. IT'S NOT LIKE I'M ASHAMED OF THE LABEL.
SO YOU'RE AN ALIEN?

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CLUE?

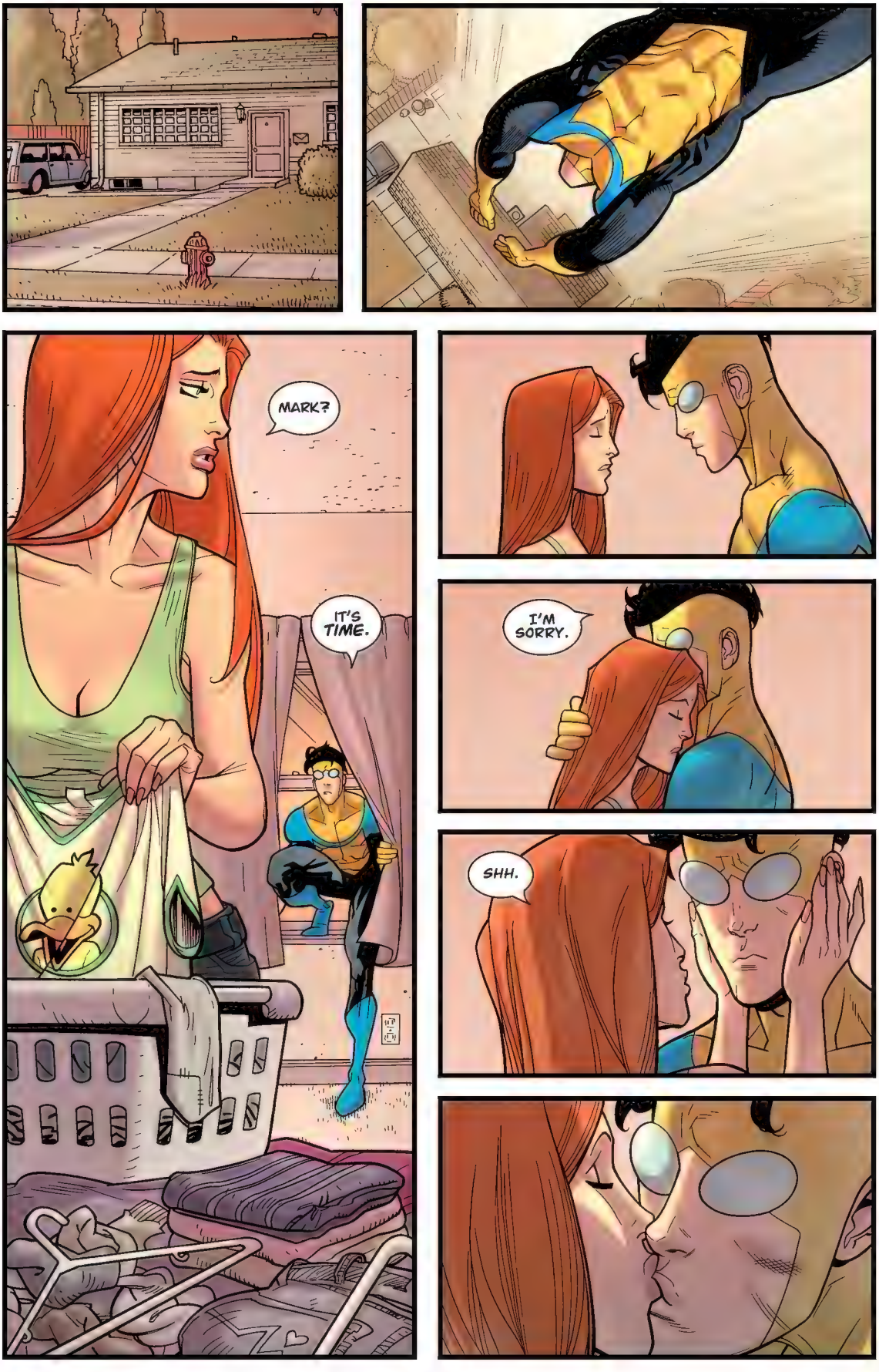

MARK, I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOUR BROTHER.
I WAS WORRIED YOU DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ME.

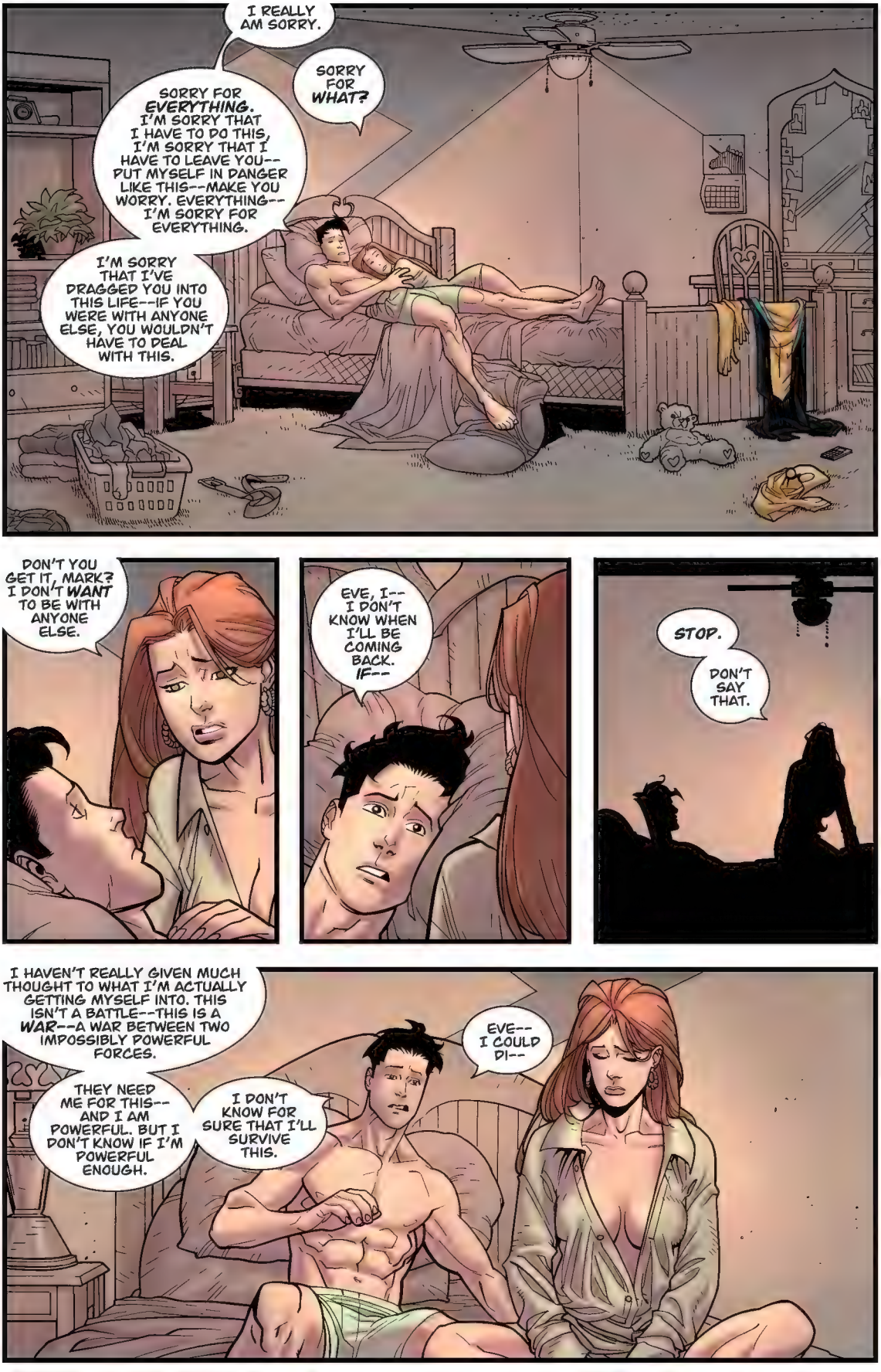
I RECOGNIZE YOU, SON. I'VE... MISSED YOU SO MUCH.
YOU'VE GROWN UP SO MUCH SINCE I LAST SAW YOU. TELL ME EVERYTHING ABOUT YOUR LIFE HERE ON EARTH. I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT EVERYTHING.
WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED... WHAT YOU'VE EXPERIENCED.

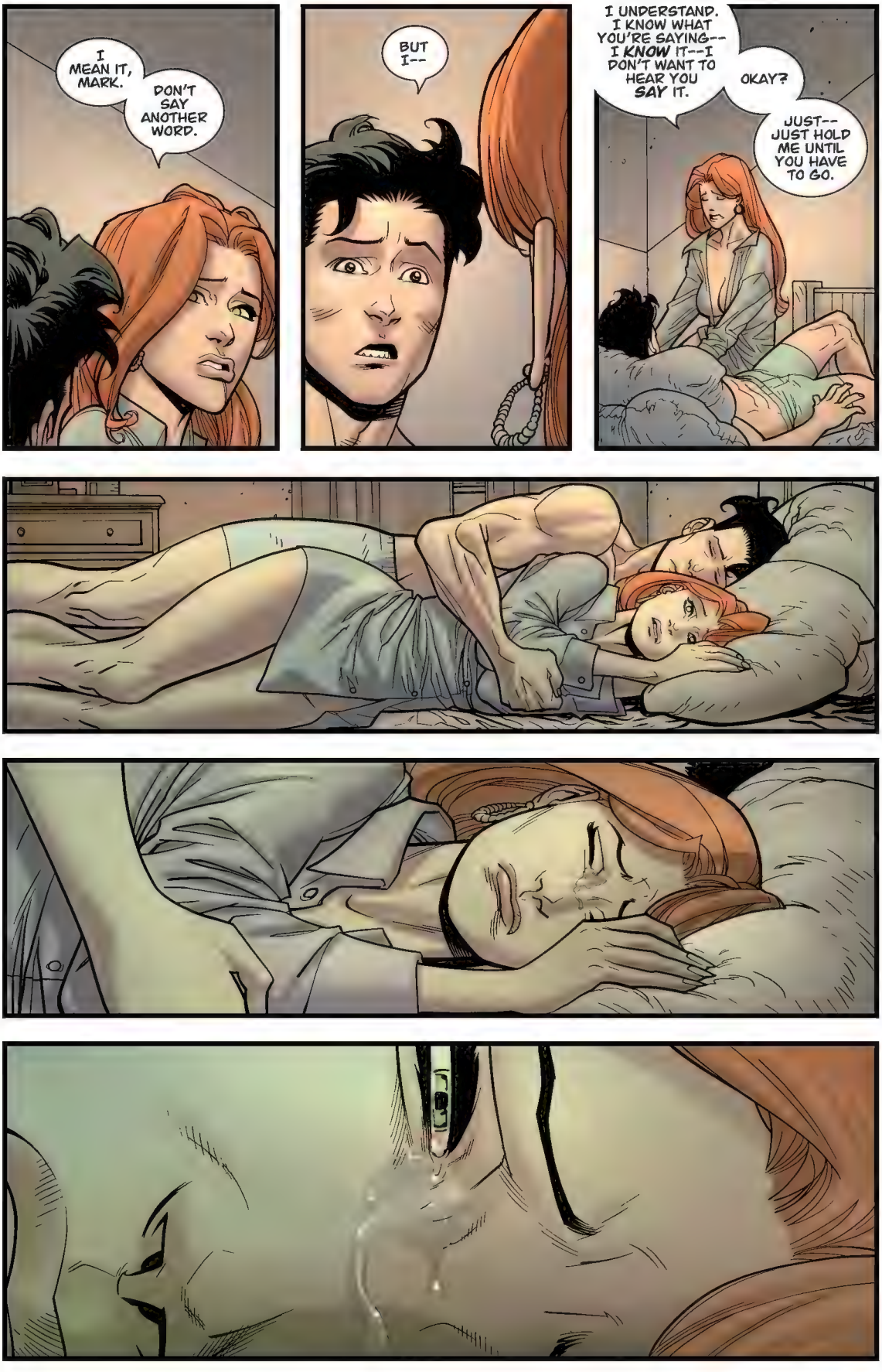
I DON'T REALLY KNOW WHERE TO START... THERE'S BEEN A LOT.
I DON'T KNOW...

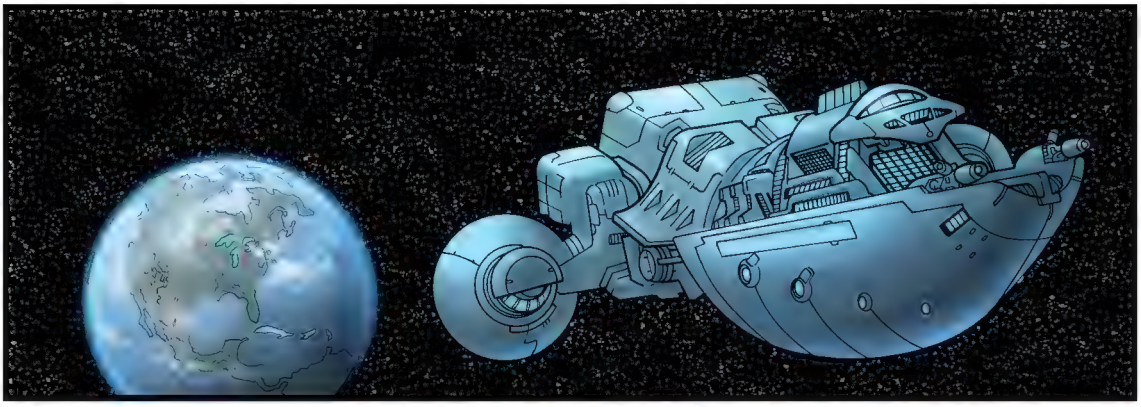
I'VE CHANGED MY MIND. I THINK THAT YOU SHOULD COME WITH US.
MAYBE WE CAN TALK MORE DURING THE TRIP. THERE IS MUCH YOU COULD LEARN.

HELL YEAH!

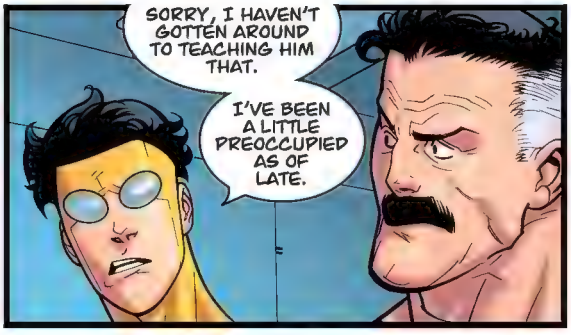

MARK?
IT'S TIME.
I'M SORRY.
SHH.


I REALLY AM SORRY.
SORRY FOR *EVERYTHING.* I'M SORRY THAT I HAVE TO DO THIS, I'M SORRY THAT I HAVE TO LEAVE YOU--PUT MYSELF IN DANGER LIKE THIS--MAKE YOU WORRY. EVERYTHING--I'M SORRY FOR EVERYTHING.
SORRY FOR *WHAT?*
I'M SORRY THAT I'VE DRAGGED YOU INTO THIS LIFE--IF YOU WERE WITH ANYONE ELSE, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH THIS.
DON'T YOU GET IT, MARK? I DON'T *WANT* TO BE WITH ANYONE ELSE.
EVE, I--I DON'T KNOW WHEN I'LL BE COMING BACK. *IF--*
STOP.
DON'T SAY THAT.
I HAVEN'T REALLY GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO WHAT I'M ACTUALLY GETTING MYSELF INTO. THIS ISN'T A BATTLE--THIS IS A *WAR*--A WAR BETWEEN TWO IMPOSSIBLY POWERFUL FORCES.
THEY NEED ME FOR THIS--AND I AM POWERFUL. BUT I DON'T KNOW IF I'M POWERFUL ENOUGH.
I DON'T KNOW FOR SURE THAT I'LL SURVIVE THIS.
EVE--I COULD DI--


I MEAN IT, MARK.
DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD.
BUT I--
I UNDERSTAND. I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING-- I KNOW IT--I DON'T WANT TO HEAR YOU SAY IT.
OKAY?
JUST-- JUST HOLD ME UNTIL YOU HAVE TO GO.

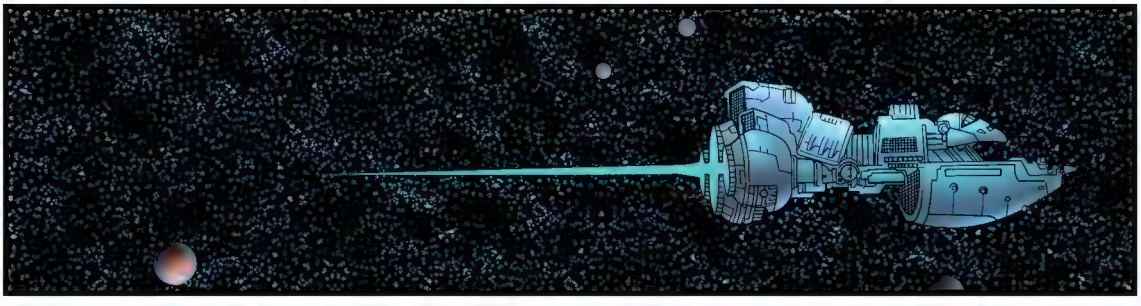


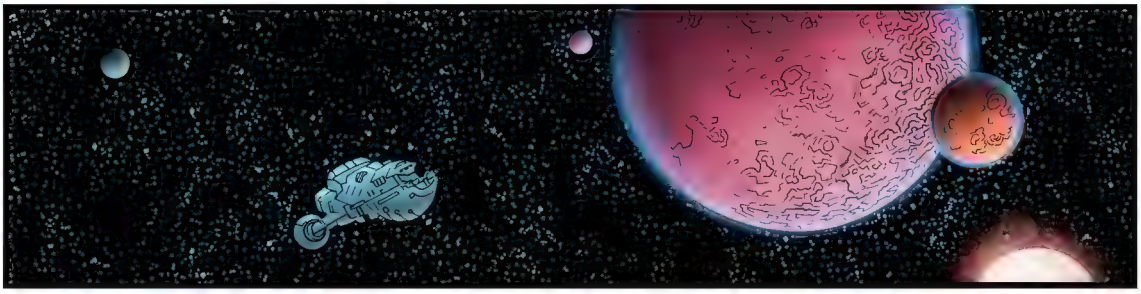
TO BE HONEST, I KIND OF FIGURED WE'D JUST BE FLYING THERE OURSELVES.
I'D RATHER WE HAD. I REQUESTED ANY SHIP BUT *THIS* ONE. THE CREW IS PATHETIC. STILL, EVEN WITH OUR ABILITIES, IT'S DIFFICULT TO TRAVEL THIS KIND OF DISTANCE WITHOUT A SHIP.
WE CAN ONLY HOLD OUR BREATH FOR SO LONG.
TAKE THESE EARPIECES. KEEP THEM IN AT ALL TIMES. IT WILL ALLOW US TO SPEAK TELEPATHICALLY TO EACH OTHER IN SPACE. IT'S SIMILAR TO WHAT ALLEN USES. IF WE DON'T ALL HAVE THEM, THE DISCUSSION ONLY WORKS ONE WAY.
NEAT. ALWAYS WONDERED ABOUT THAT.
WAIT, HOW LONG CAN WE HOLD OUR BREATH?


SORRY, I HAVEN'T GOTTEN AROUND TO TEACHING HIM THAT.
I'VE BEEN A LITTLE PREOCCUPIED AS OF LATE.

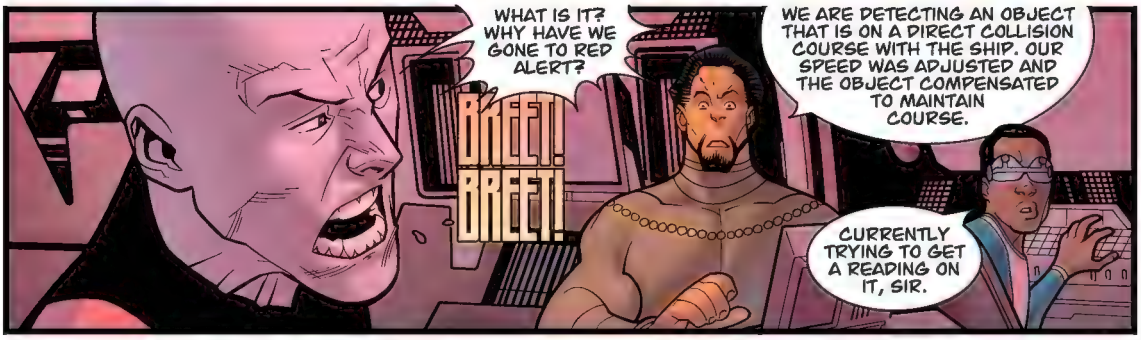
I *SAW* THAT. SHE'S VERY PRETTY.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT.
HAH.
SO SERIOUSLY-- I CAN HOLD MY BREATH FOR A LONG TIME?





WHOA, WHAT WAS THAT BLUR? DID WE JUST PASS A PLANET? THAT WAS COOL.
YES, WHENEVER POSSIBLE WE TRY TO CHART OUR COURSE ALONG THE PATH OF ANY PLANETS WITH A BREATHABLE ATMOSPHERE. IT COMES IN HANDY DURING EMERGENCIES.
THANKS FOR LETTING US ON THE BRIDGE, CAPTAIN. WE'VE BEEN GETTING A LITTLE STIR CRAZY THESE LAST FEW DAYS. SO IT'S FUN TO ACTUALLY SEE WHERE WE'RE GOING FOR A CHANGE.
NOT A PROBLEM, INVINCIBLE. THE COALITION--


WHAT IS IT? WHY HAVE WE GONE TO RED ALERT?
BREET! BREET!
WE ARE DETECTING AN OBJECT THAT IS ON A DIRECT COLLISION COURSE WITH THE SHIP. OUR SPEED WAS ADJUSTED AND THE OBJECT COMPENSATED TO MAINTAIN COURSE.
CURRENTLY TRYING TO GET A READING ON IT, SIR.

BREET!

BREET!

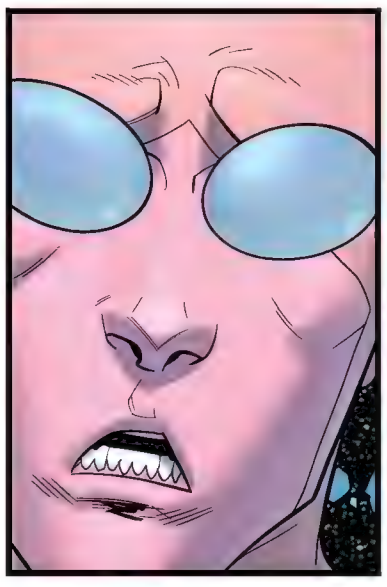
IT'S MOVING IN FAR TOO FAST. WE CAN'T GET A CLEAR READING ON IT.
BRACE FOR IMPACT IN THREE, TWO--

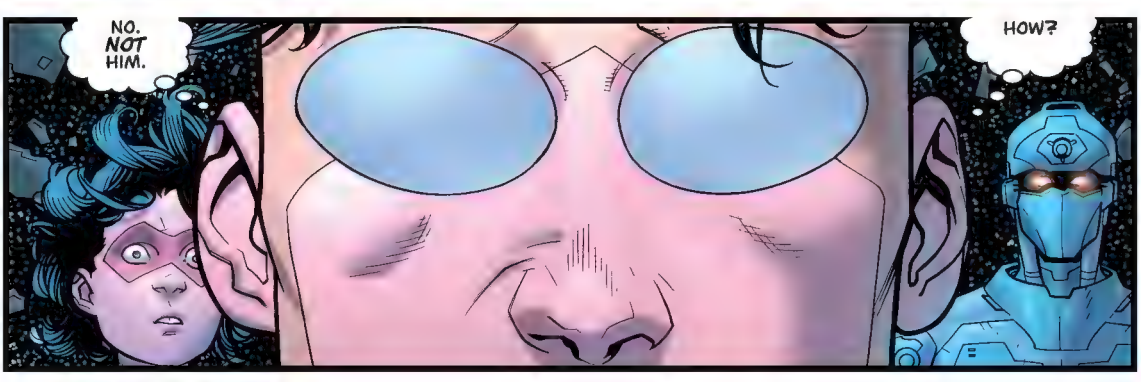
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!
ARE WE MOVING FASTER? WHAT'S GOING ON?

IN THE EVENT OF IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO THE SHIP, THE BRIDGE AUTOMATICALLY DETACHES AND RETURNS TO BASE.
WHATEVER THAT WAS-- IT'S DESTROYED THE REST OF THE SHIP.

MY DAD IS BACK THERE!
POINT ME TO THE NEAREST AIRLOCK--OR I'M MAKING MY OWN EXIT. UNDERSTAND?!

WHAT WAS IT?
JUST STAY ALERT--LOOK FOR DAD AND ALLEN.

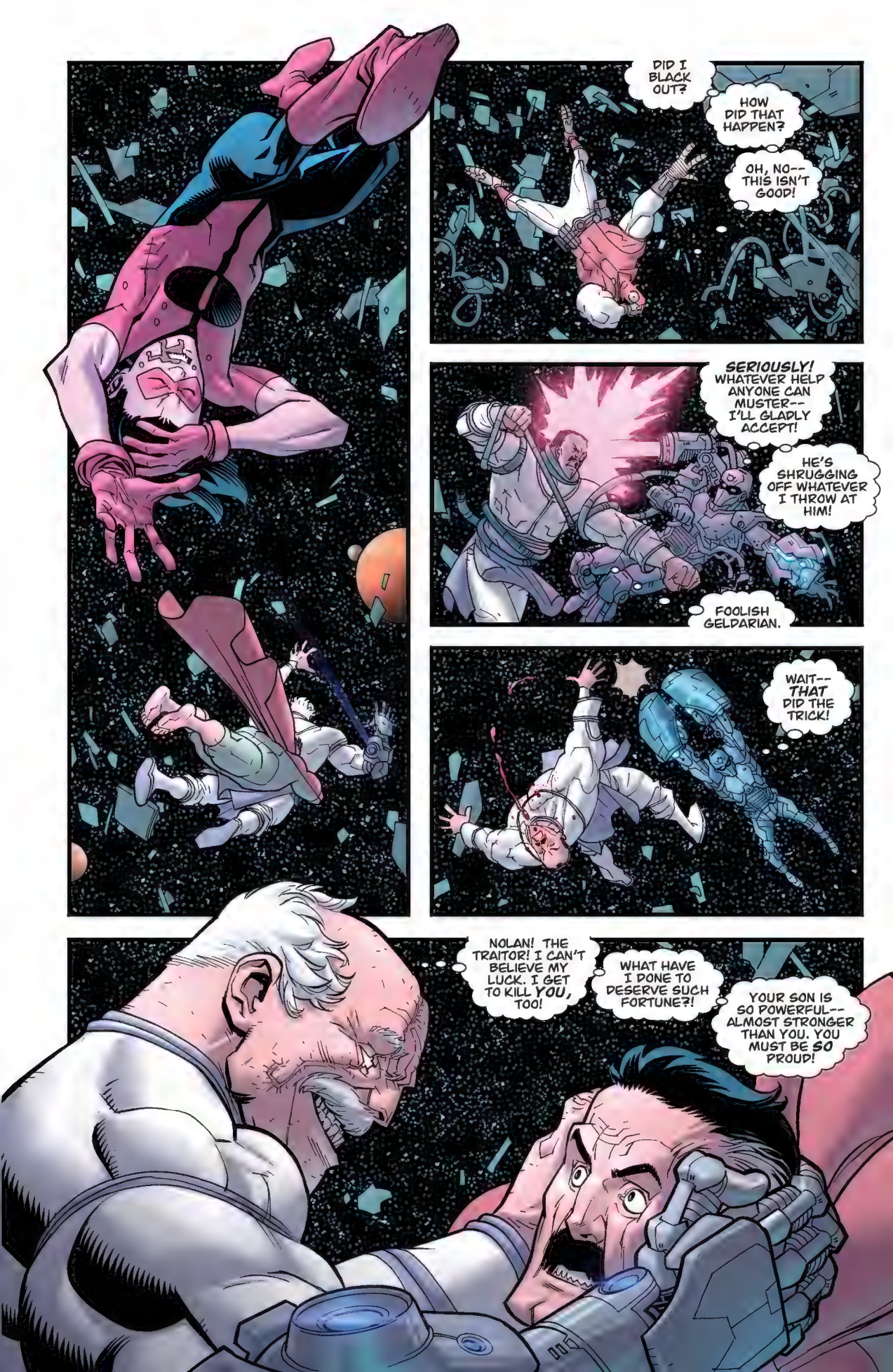


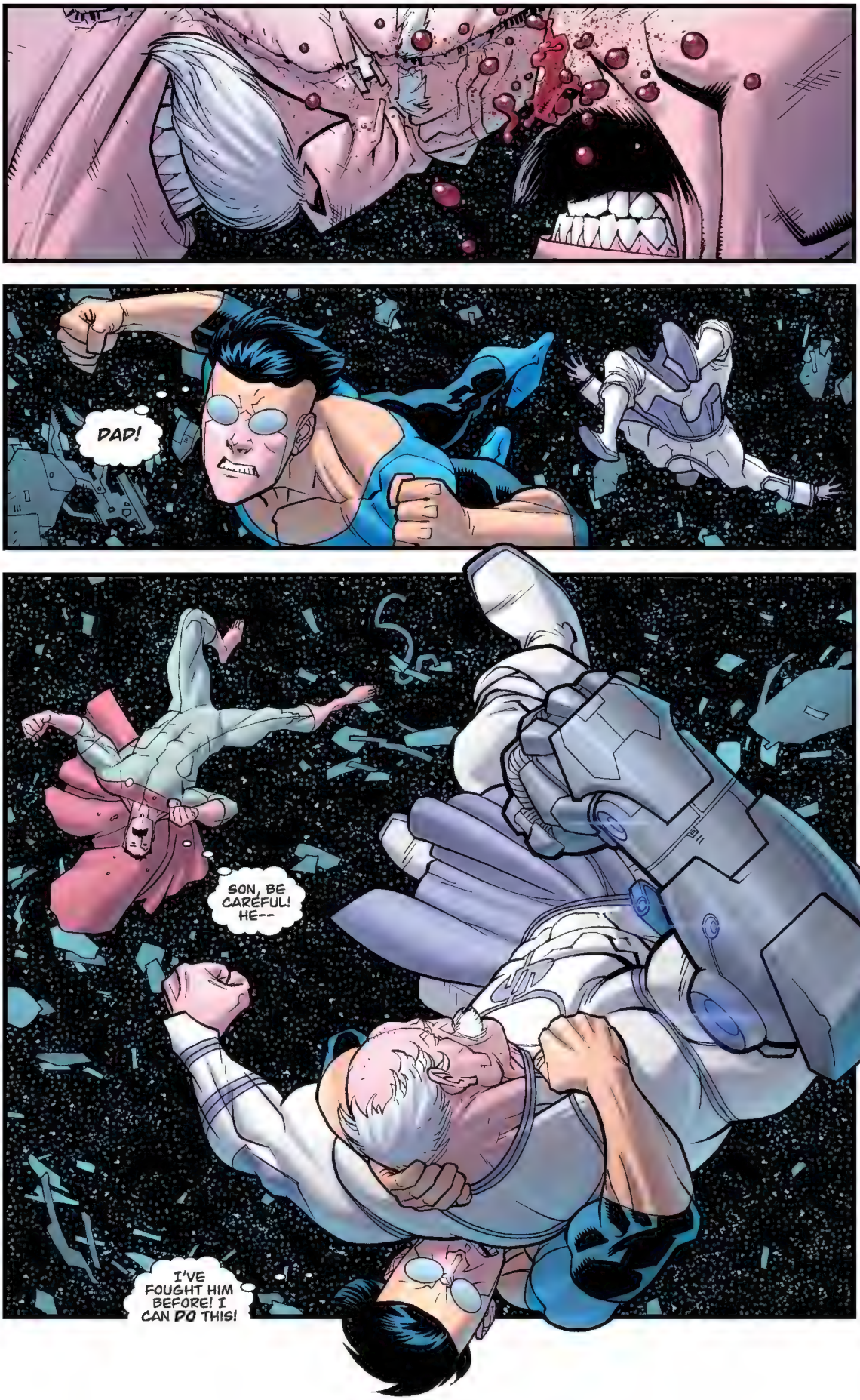

NO. NOT HIM.
HOW?

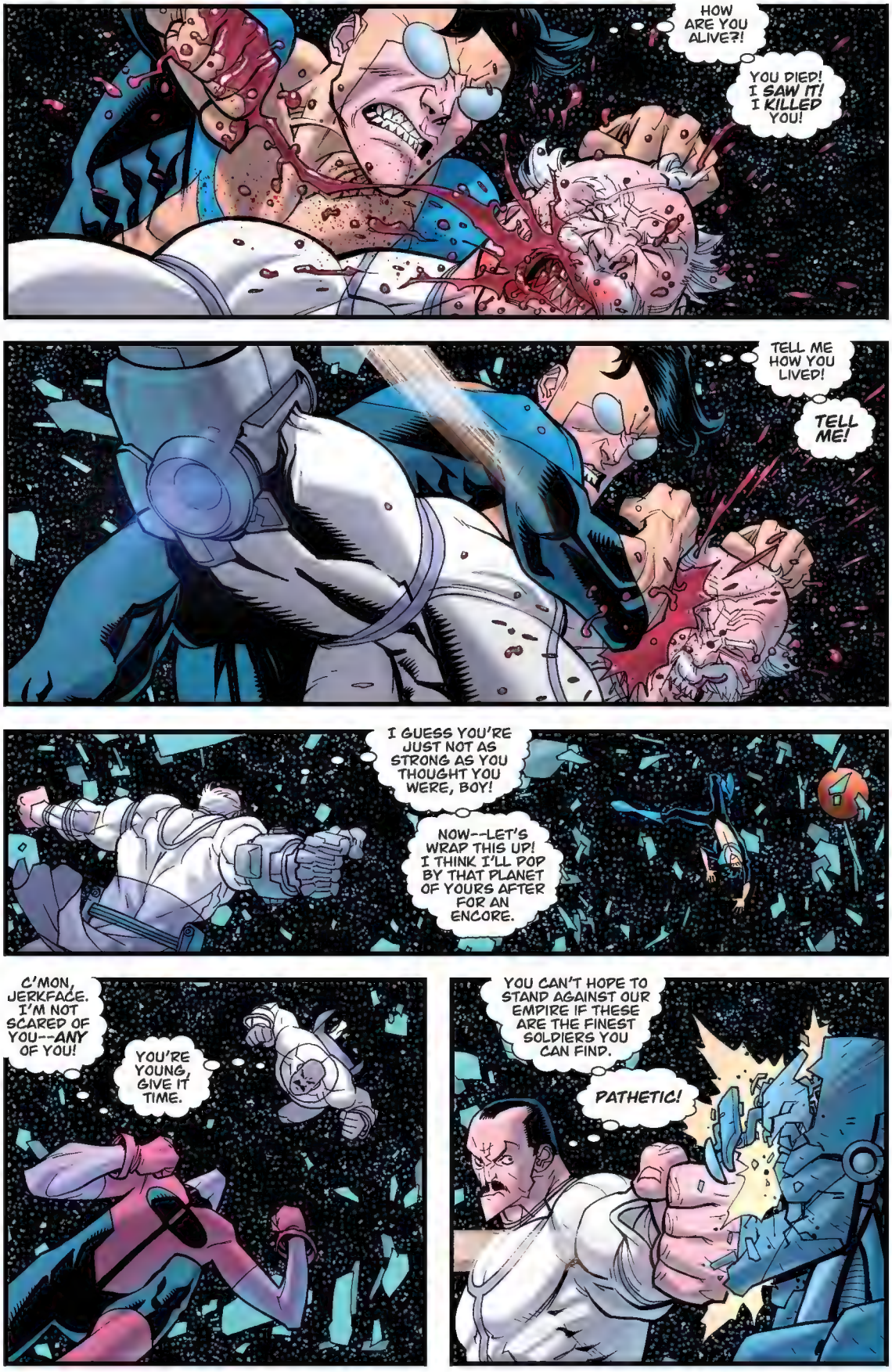
CHAPTER TWO
RYAN
99
+fco

OH, MARK. IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
AND I SEE YOU'VE BROUGHT FRIENDS.
PUTTING IT ALL ON THE TABLE, MY ORDERS ARE SIMPLE. SLAUGHTER YOU AND EVERYONE WITH YOU.
I'M SO HAPPY TO GET ANOTHER SHOT AT YOU. I'LL ADMIT I UNDERESTIMATED YOU THE FIRST TIME. I TRUST YOU LEFT THE GIRL AT HOME THIS TIME?
A PITY.
YOU'VE BROUGHT ALONG SOME HELP, WHICH SHOULD MAKE THINGS MORE INTERESTING. ALTHOUGH, I THINK YOU'VE GROSSLY OVERESTIMATED THE ABILITIES OF THE GELDARIANS. THEY NEED THEIR TECHNOLOGY TO HOLD THEIR HEADS UP. HE'LL BE USELESS.
AND THE BOY, GOOD TO SEE HIS ARM HEALED. I'LL ENJOY BREAKING IT AGAIN.
MARK, I WANT YOU TO ENJOY THE SHOW, SO I'LL BE KILLING YOU LAST.

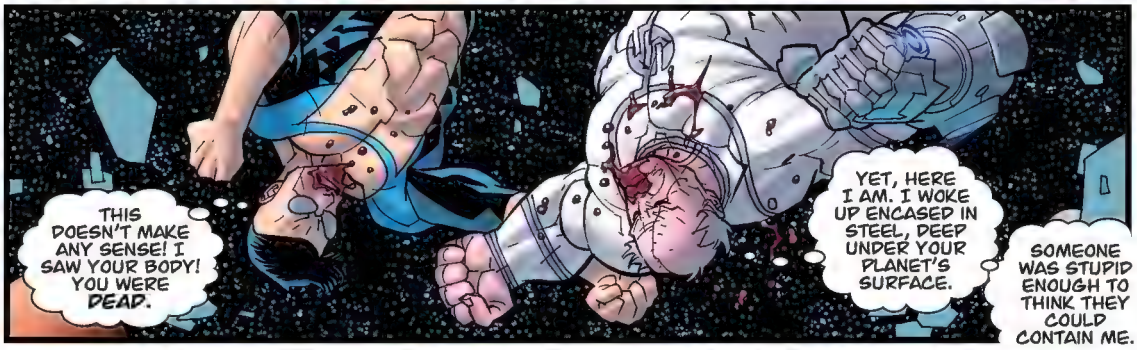
THAT'S IT! I'M MESSING THIS GUY UP!
OLIVER-- NO!
UH, I KINDA THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A BRIEFING OR SOMETHING BEFORE WE ACTUALLY STARTED FIGHTING.
WHAT DO I DO? DO THEY HAVE WEAK SPOTS OR ANYTHING?
CONQUEST?
NO--
OLIVER!
YOU'LL MAKE A NICE WARM UP!

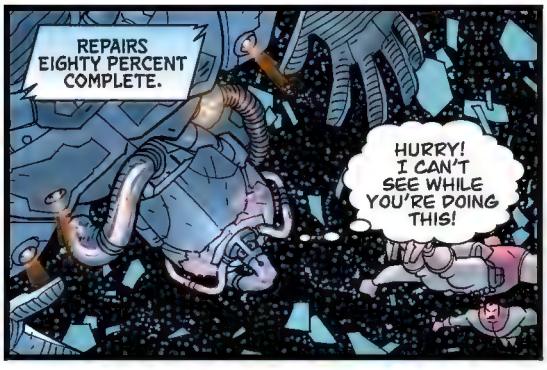

DID I BLACK OUT?
HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?
OH, NO-- THIS ISN'T GOOD!
SERIOUSLY! WHATEVER HELP ANYONE CAN MUSTER-- I'LL GLADLY ACCEPT!
HE'S SHRUGGING OFF WHATEVER I THROW AT HIM!
FOOLISH GELDARIAN.
WAIT-- THAT DID THE TRICK!
NOLAN! THE TRAITOR! I CAN'T BELIEVE MY LUCK. I GET TO KILL YOU, TOO!
WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE SUCH FORTUNE?!
YOUR SON IS SO POWERFUL-- ALMOST STRONGER THAN YOU. YOU MUST BE SO PROUD!


DAD!
SON, BE CAREFUL! HE--
I'VE FOUGHT HIM BEFORE! I CAN DO THIS!

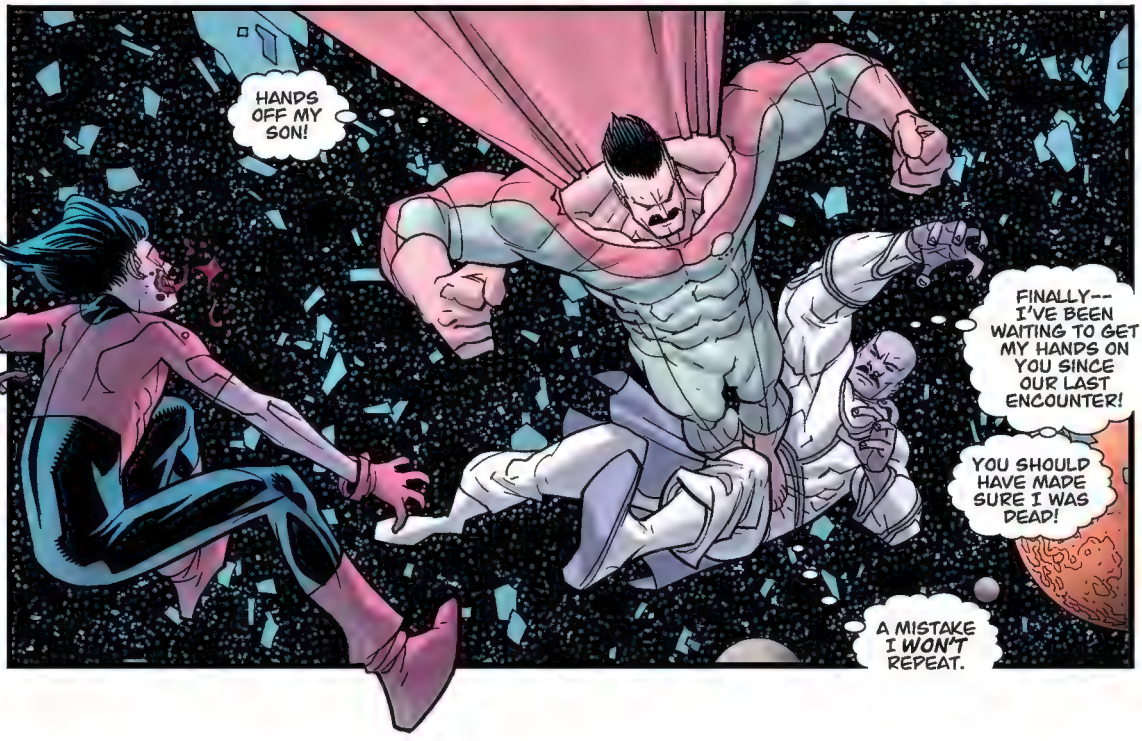

HOW ARE YOU ALIVE?!
YOU DIED! I SAW IT! I KILLED YOU!
TELL ME HOW YOU LIVED!
TELL ME!
I GUESS YOU'RE JUST NOT AS STRONG AS YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE, BOY!
NOW--LET'S WRAP THIS UP! I THINK I'LL POP BY THAT PLANET OF YOURS AFTER FOR AN ENCORE.
C'MON, JERKFACE. I'M NOT SCARED OF YOU--ANY OF YOU!
YOU'RE YOUNG, GIVE IT TIME.
YOU CAN'T HOPE TO STAND AGAINST OUR EMPIRE IF THESE ARE THE FINEST SOLDIERS YOU CAN FIND.
PATHETIC!

YOU OKAY?
YEAH, I'M FINE. I THINK MY HELMET CAN REPAIR ITSELF.


THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE! I SAW YOUR BODY! YOU WERE DEAD.
YET, HERE I AM. I WOKE UP ENCASED IN STEEL, DEEP UNDER YOUR PLANET'S SURFACE.
SOMEONE WAS STUPID ENOUGH TO THINK THEY COULD CONTAIN ME.


REPAIRS EIGHTY PERCENT COMPLETE.
HURRY! I CAN'T SEE WHILE YOU'RE DOING THIS!

OH, YOU THINK YOU CAN--


HANDS OFF MY SON!
FINALLY-- I'VE BEEN WAITING TO GET MY HANDS ON YOU SINCE OUR LAST ENCOUNTER!
YOU SHOULD HAVE MADE SURE I WAS DEAD!
A MISTAKE I WON'T REPEAT.

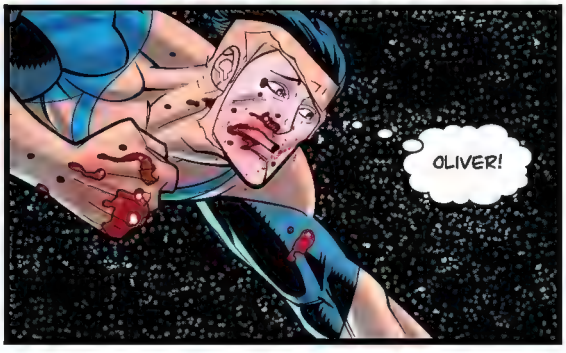
CECIL KEPT YOU ALIVE?! THAT HAS TO BE IT!
I CAN'T BELIEVE HE'D--WHEN I SEE HIM AGAIN...!
HOW OPTIMISTIC YOU ARE.
YOU WON'T BE SEEING ANYONE AGAIN!
THANKS, KID.
I'M GETTING THE HANG OF THIS.
I PROMISE I'M NOT COMPLETELY USELESS.
IT'S ALL OVER NOW, ASSFACE!
YOU FIGHT WELL, SON.
I'M IMPRESSED.
WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?! I KNOW YOUR NUMBERS ARE SPARSE, BUT THREE?! YOU'RE RIDICULOUSLY OUTNUMBERED!
WHAT EVER MADE YOU THINK YOU GUYS HAD A CHANCE?

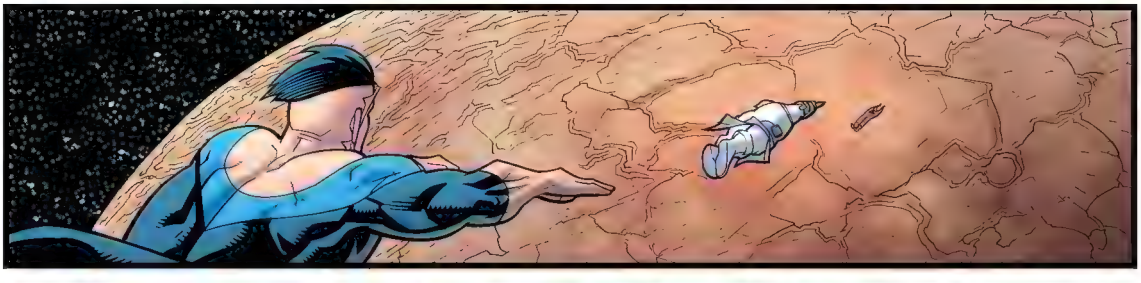
OH.

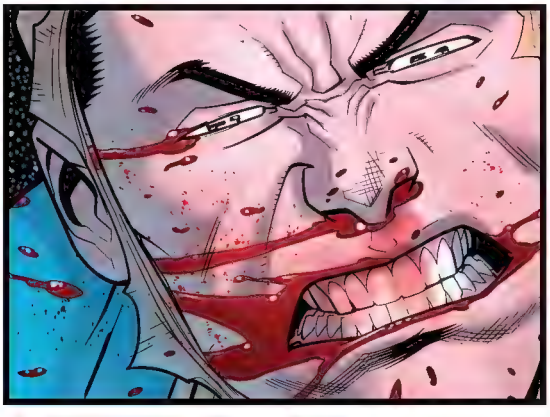
NEVER MIND. THEN.

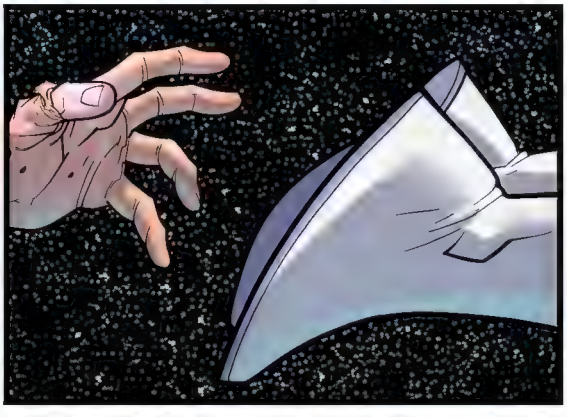
THINGS JUST GOT REAL.
NEW STRATEGY, WE NEED TO BREAK AWAY, FIND COVER. WE CAN'T FIGHT THIS MANY HEAD-ON!
AGH-- STUPID!
OUT OF AIR!
CAN'T BREATHE!
GETTING LIGHT-HEADED! WHAT DO I DO?!
THE PLANET WE PASSED-- GO!
LOOK AT THIS.
THE WEAKEST STRAYS FROM THE PACK, ENSURING ITS DEMISE.

AS I RECALL, I WAS SAVING YOU FOR LAST.


OLIVER!

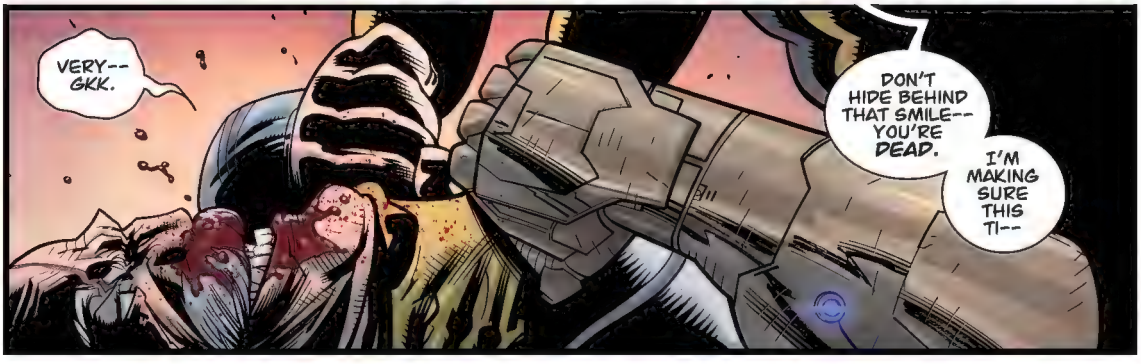






GASP!
BOOM!
BRAKKA-BOOM!!!

THAT KNOCKED THE WIND OUT OF YOU-- DIDN'T IT?
OR DID YOU JUST EXHALE KNOWING THAT YOU WERE COMING TO THIS PLANET--AND COULD GET A BREATH?

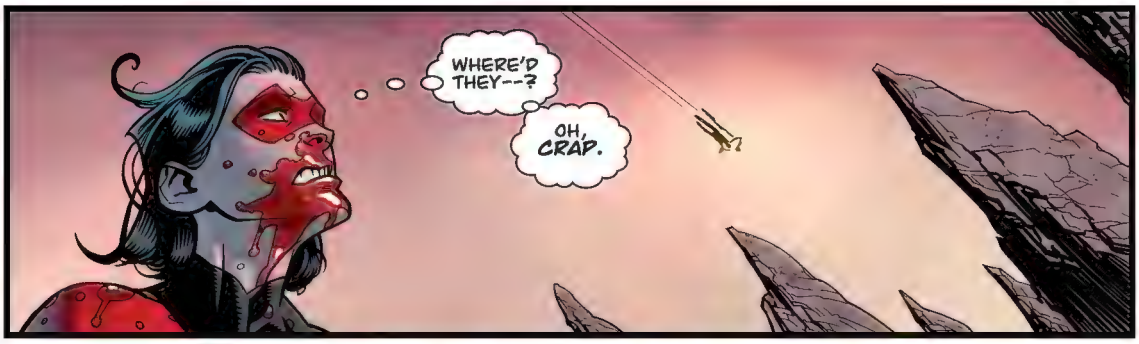

VERY-- GKK.
DON'T HIDE BEHIND THAT SMILE-- YOU'RE DEAD.
I'M MAKING SURE THIS TI--

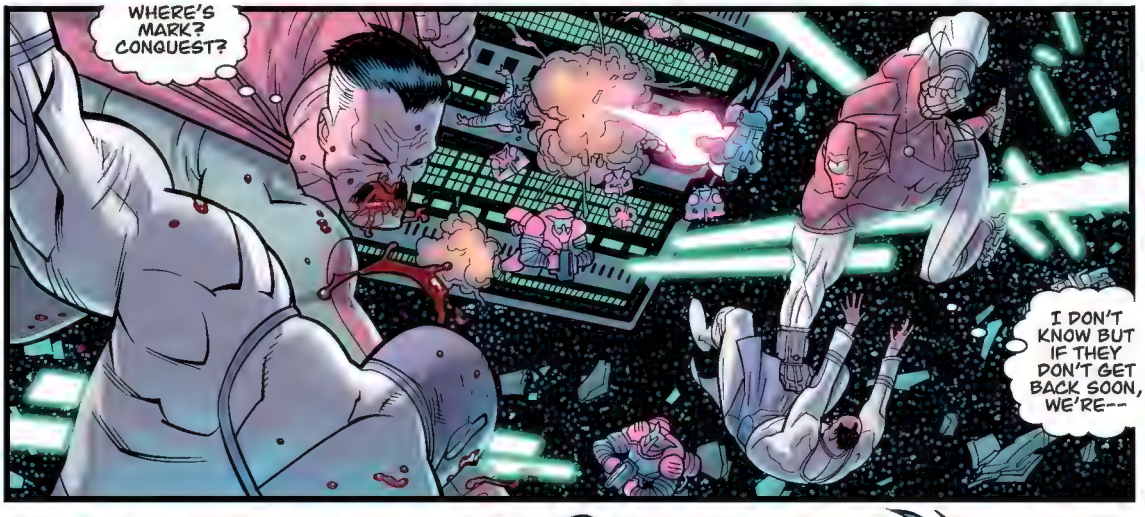
KROOM!

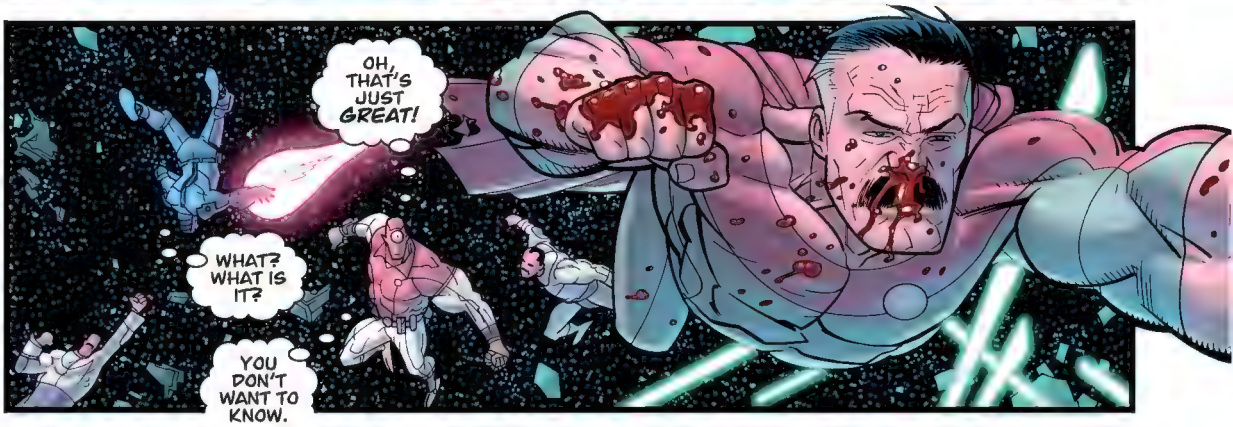
WROKK!

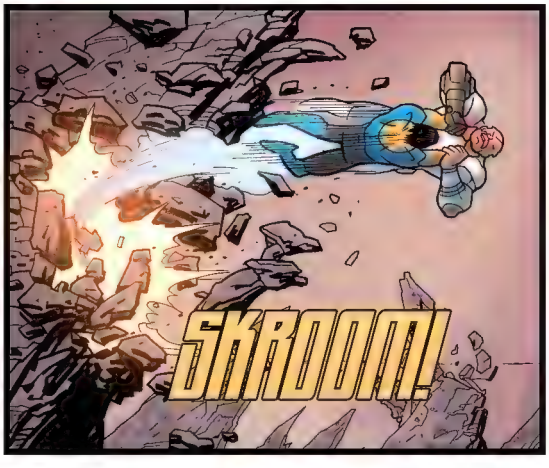
WHAT'S THIS SUPPOSED TO DO? I GOT A BREATH.
YOU REALLY THINK I CAN'T MAKE YOU LET GO?

LOOKS LIKE I'M CHANGING THE DEATH ORDER. YOU'RE NUMBER ONE, KID.


WHERE'D THEY--?
OH, CRAP.


WHERE'S MARK? CONQUEST?
I DON'T KNOW BUT IF THEY DON'T GET BACK SOON, WE'RE--


OH, THAT'S JUST GREAT!
WHAT? WHAT IS IT?
YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

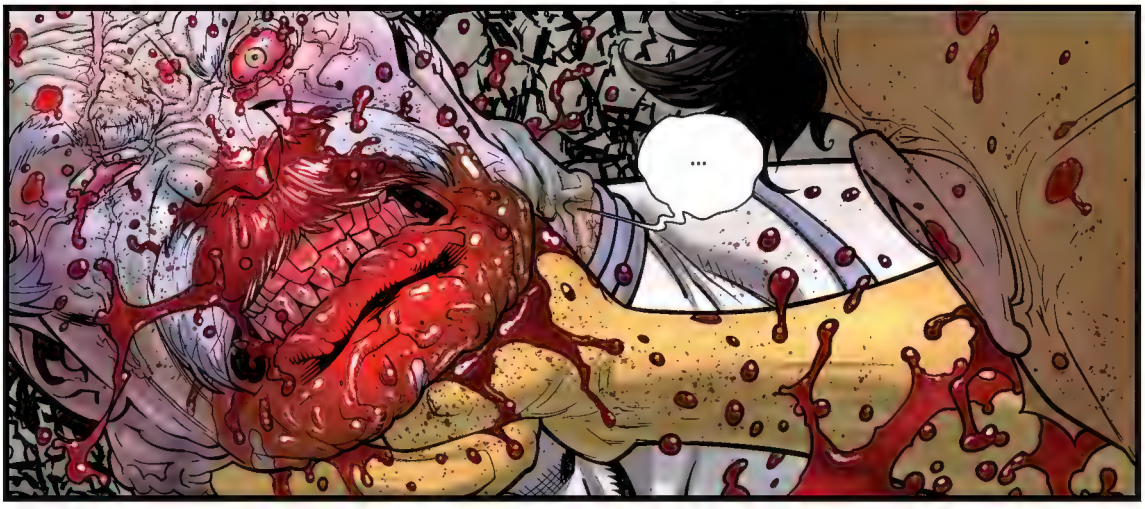

SKROOM!

GETTING IT NOW, ARE YOU?! DONE SCREWING AROUND?! I'M NOT LETTING GO, CONQUEST!
I'M NOT!
SKURGG!

KRUM!
GOOM!
NOT--
LETTING--
GO--
BOOM!
KHOOM!
NOT--
STOPPING--
SKRAGG!
=GLK.=
=HRK.=

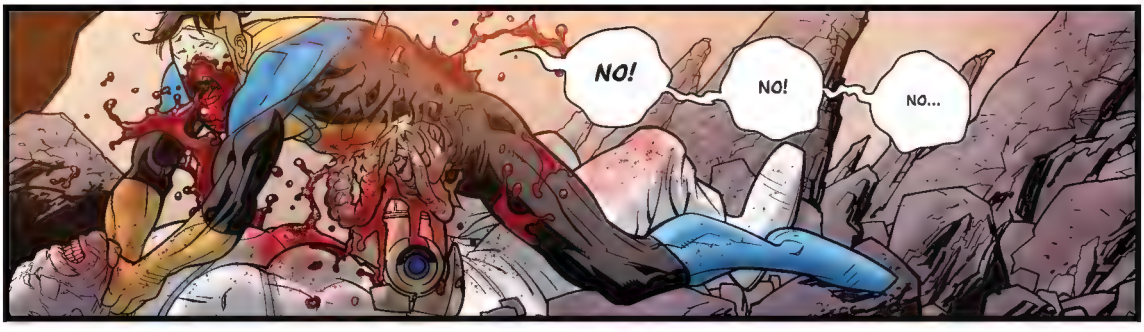
SPLAGG!!

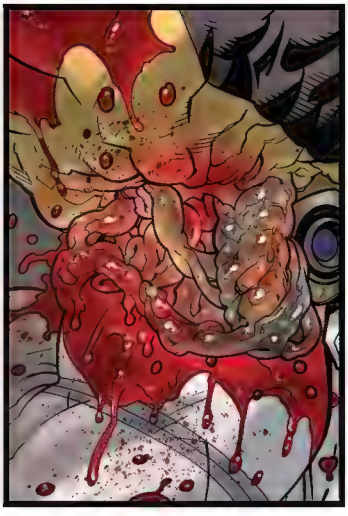
NOT--
ENOUGH--!

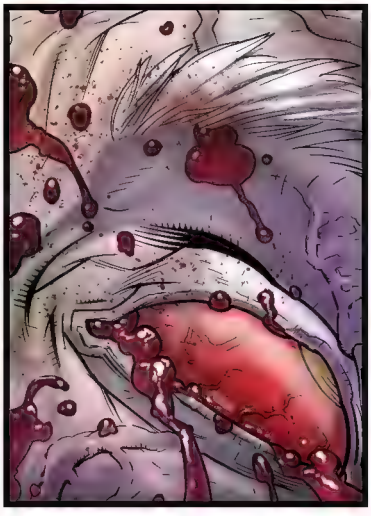

...

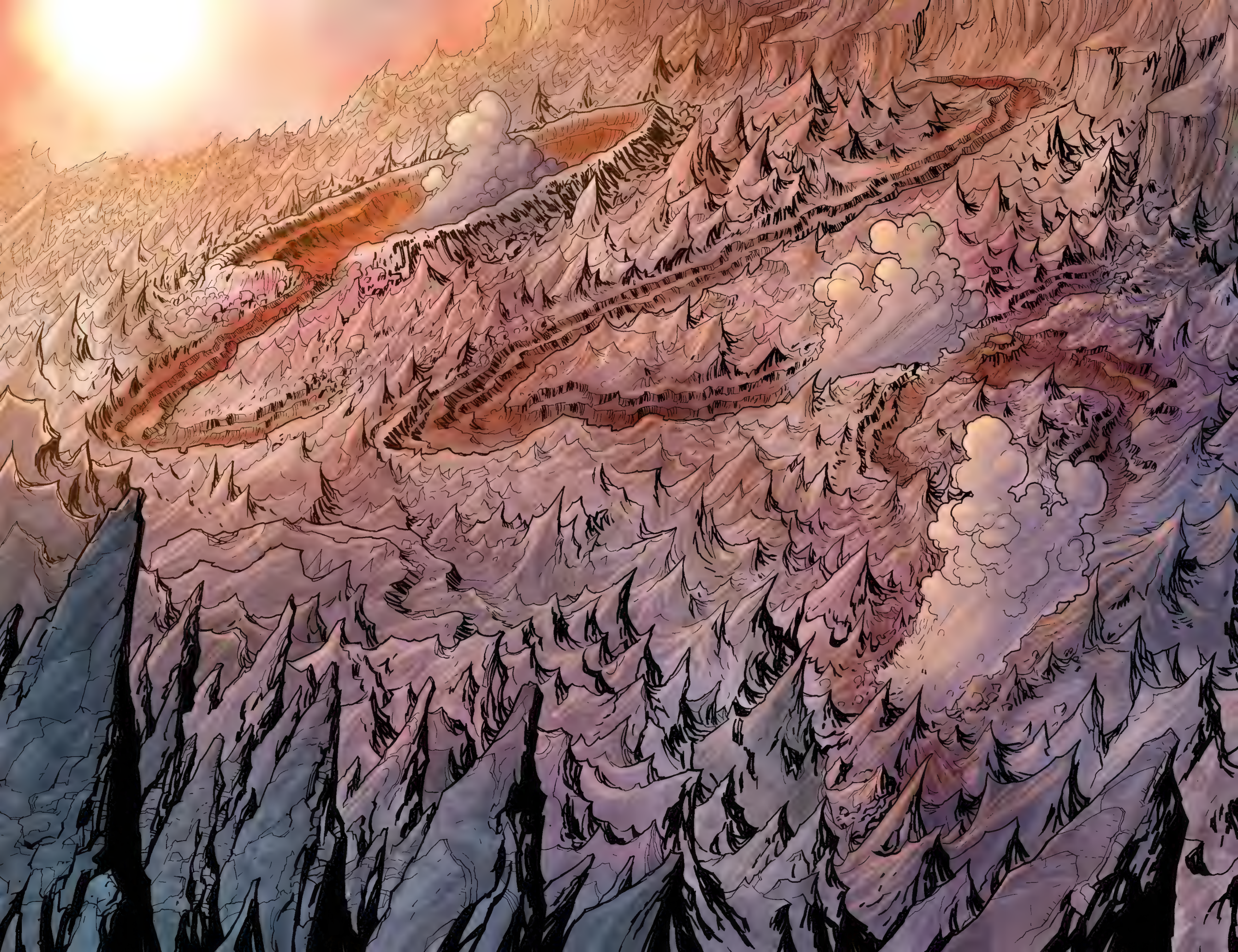
HOW--
LONG UNTIL--

UNGH!


NO!
NO!
NO...

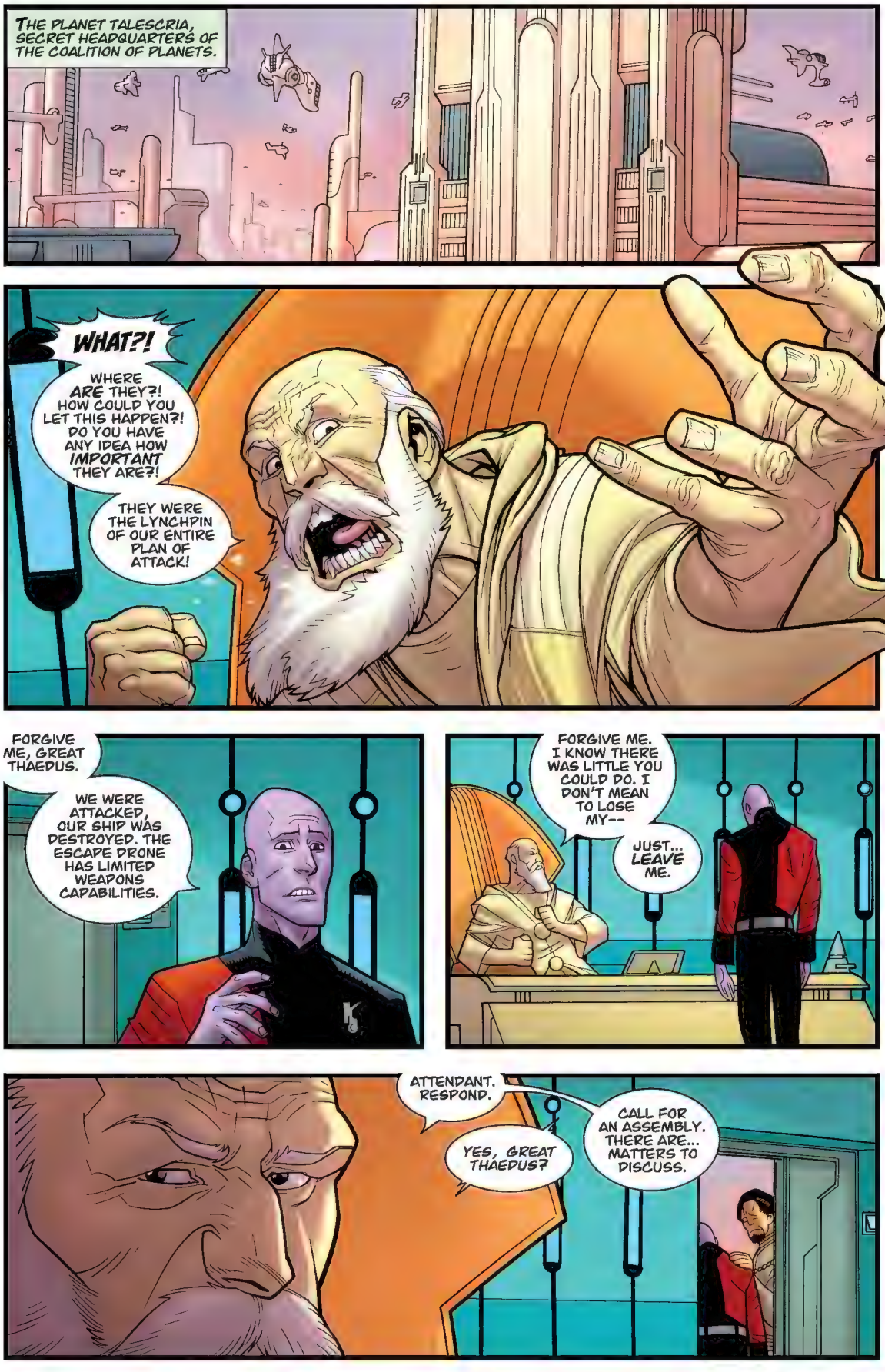


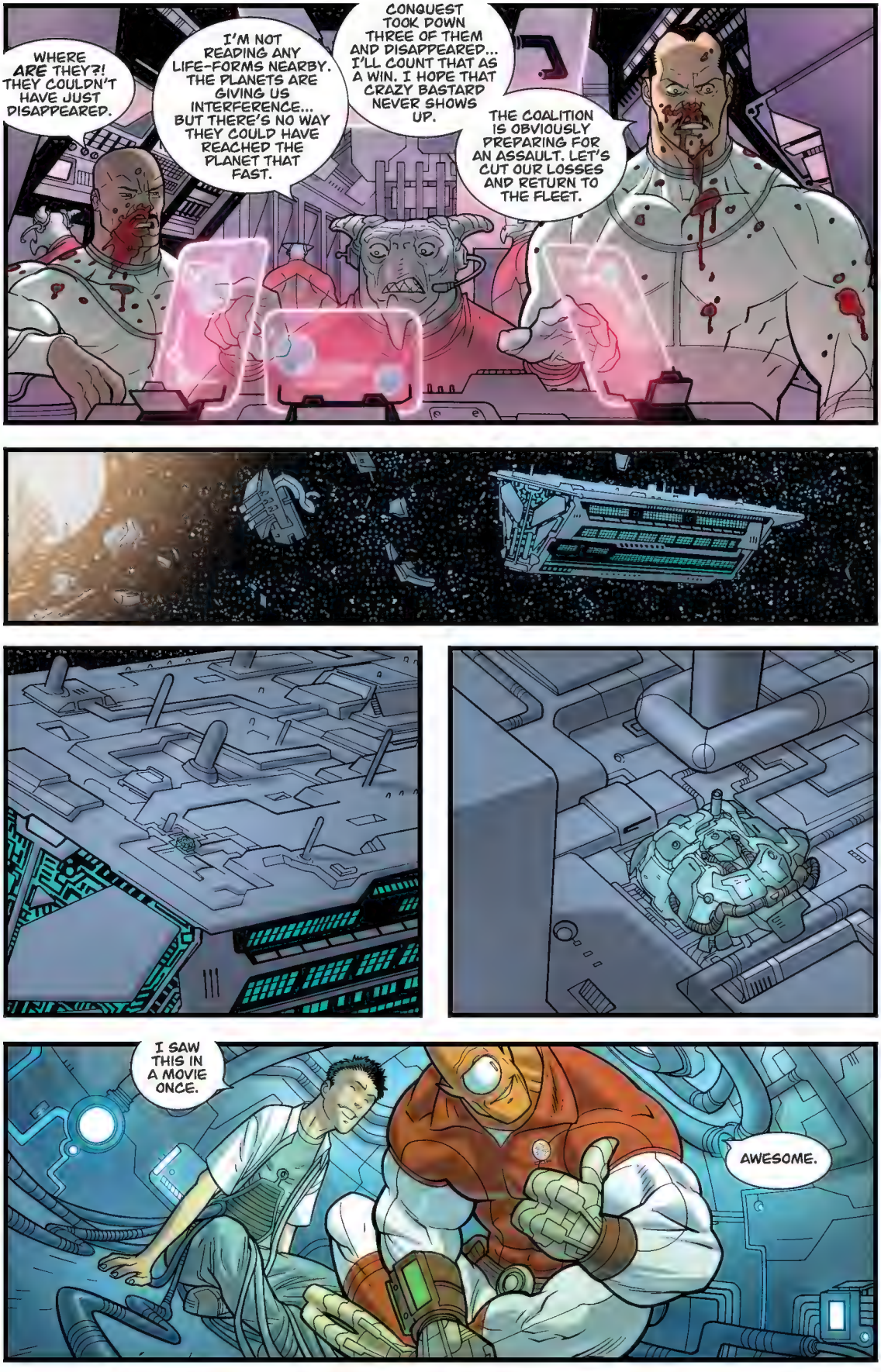


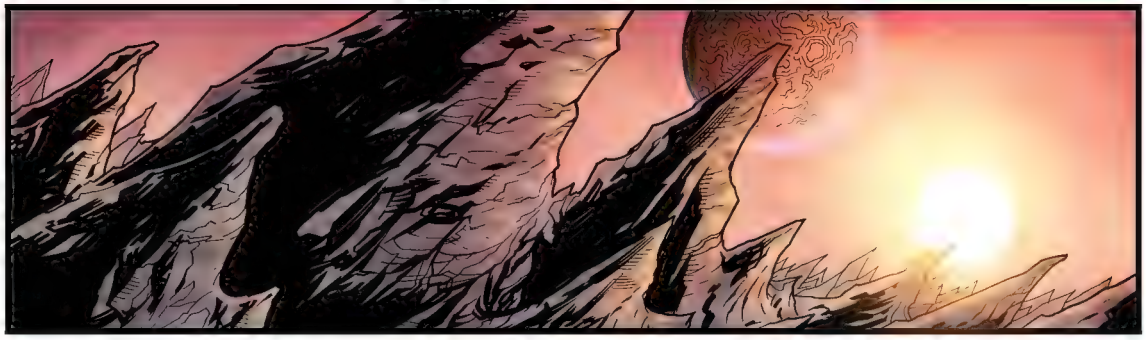


=HUFF!=
=HUFF!=
=HUFF!=
HELP.

CHAPTER THREE
RYAN +fco


THE PLANET TALESCRIA, SECRET HEADQUARTERS OF THE COALITION OF PLANETS.
WHAT?!
WHERE ARE THEY?! HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN?! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW IMPORTANT THEY ARE?!
THEY WERE THE LYNCHPIN OF OUR ENTIRE PLAN OF ATTACK!
FORGIVE ME, GREAT THAEDUS.
WE WERE ATTACKED, OUR SHIP WAS DESTROYED. THE ESCAPE DRONE HAS LIMITED WEAPONS CAPABILITIES.
FORGIVE ME. I KNOW THERE WAS LITTLE YOU COULD DO. I DON'T MEAN TO LOSE MY--
JUST... LEAVE ME.
ATTENDANT. RESPOND.
YES, GREAT THAEDUS?
CALL FOR AN ASSEMBLY. THERE ARE... MATTERS TO DISCUSS.


WHERE ARE THEY?! THEY COULDN'T HAVE JUST DISAPPEARED.
I'M NOT READING ANY LIFE-FORMS NEARBY. THE PLANETS ARE GIVING US INTERFERENCE... BUT THERE'S NO WAY THEY COULD HAVE REACHED THE PLANET THAT FAST.
CONQUEST TOOK DOWN THREE OF THEM AND DISAPPEARED... I'LL COUNT THAT AS A WIN. I HOPE THAT CRAZY BASTARD NEVER SHOWS UP.
THE COALITION IS OBVIOUSLY PREPARING FOR AN ASSAULT. LET'S CUT OUR LOSSES AND RETURN TO THE FLEET.
I SAW THIS IN A MOVIE ONCE.
AWESOME.



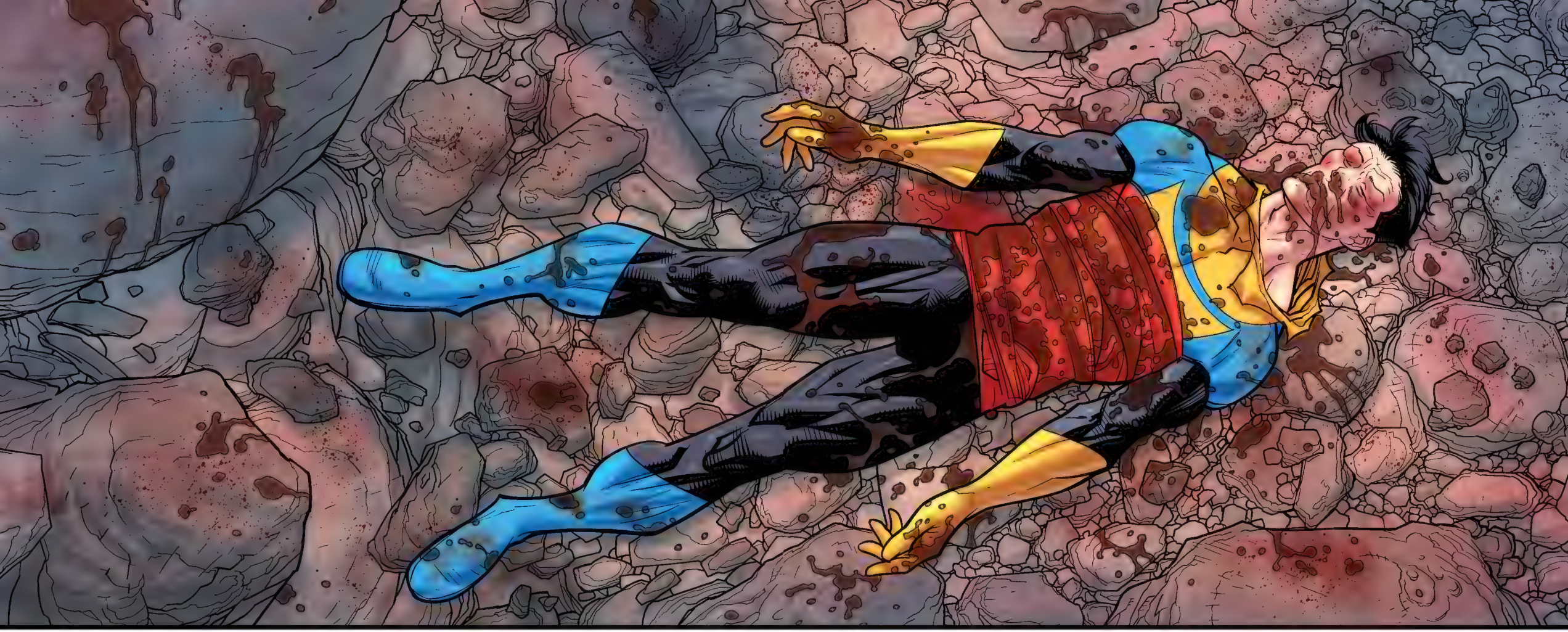
CHOOM!
WHY DID YOU BOTHER BURYING HIM?
COULDN'T WE HAVE JUST THROWN HIM INTO SPACE?

ALTHOUGH HE LOST HIS WAY IN HIS LATER YEARS, CONQUEST WAS THE GREATEST OF VILTRUMITE WARRIORS.
THAT DEMANDS A CERTAIN LEVEL OF RESPECT, DESPITE HIS ACTIONS. HE DESERVED A PROPER BURIAL.

HE DESERVED TO ROT IN THE SUN.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS GUY'S DONE.

EVERYTHING HE'S DONE WAS IN SERVICE TO THE VILTRUMITE EMPIRE.
IN A WAY... THAT MADE HIM A GREATER MAN THAN I.

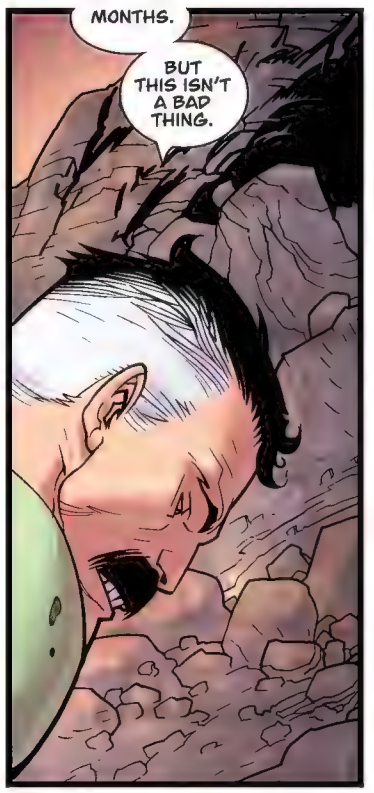
COME.
WE SHOULDN'T LEAVE MARK UNATTENDED FOR LONG.



SO, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO? ARE WE WAITING UNTIL HE HEALS ENOUGH TO TAKE HIM SOMEWHERE?
NO.

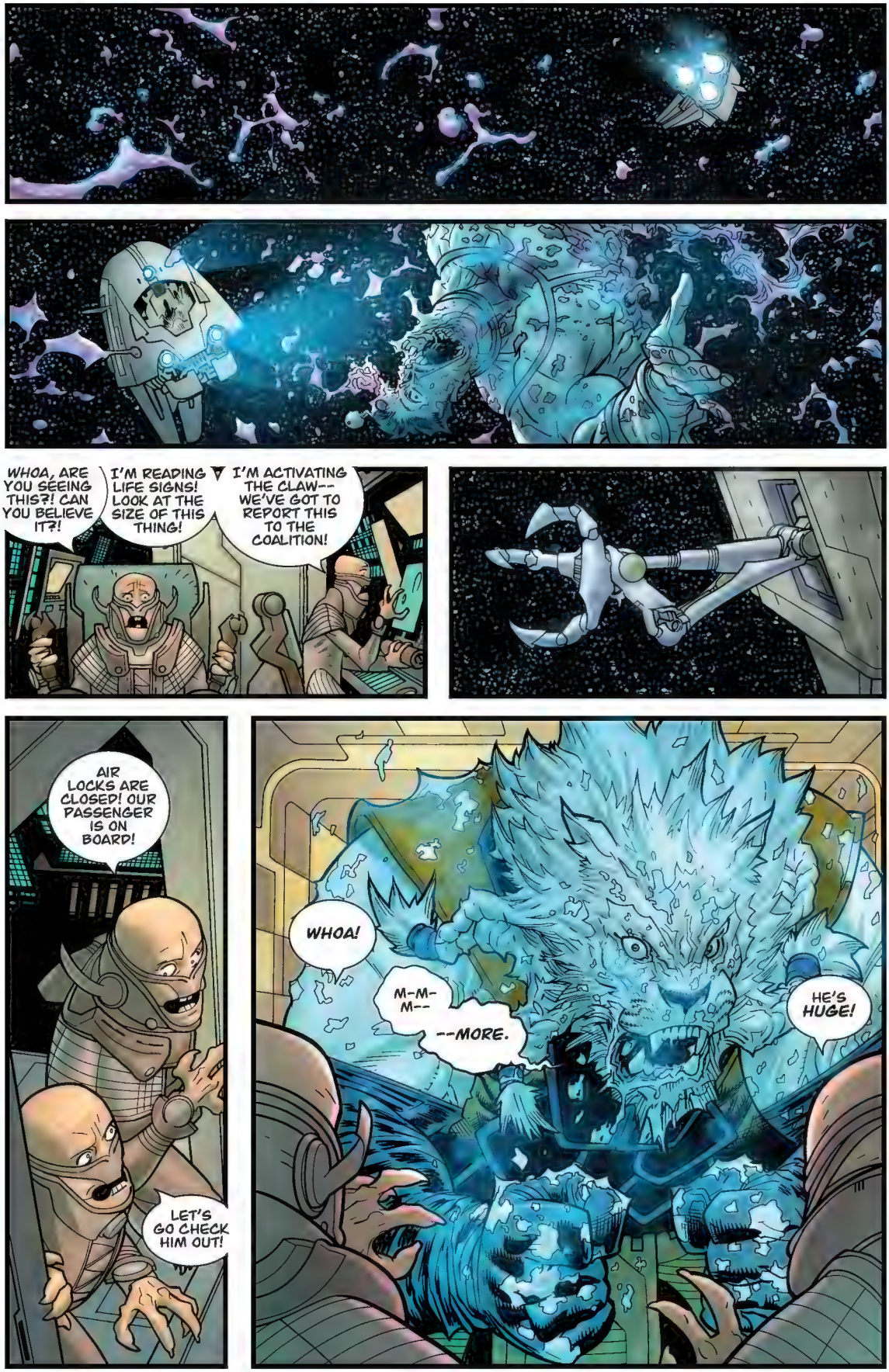
THIS IS THE SAFEST PLACE FOR HIM. THE COALITION WILL SOON BE IN OPEN WAR WITH THE VILTRUMITES-- NO COALITION FACILITY WILL BE SAFE.
MY CAPE WILL HOLD HIM TOGETHER... WITH TIME, HE'LL HEAL. WE'LL JUST NEED TO STAY HERE-- AND WATCH OVER HIM.

HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE?


MONTHS.
BUT THIS ISN'T A BAD THING.

BEING STRANDED ON THIS PLANET, MY BROTHER HALF-DEAD?
WHAT'S NOT BAD ABOUT THIS?

IT'S ENOUGH TIME FOR ME TO GET TO KNOW YOU BETTER.


WHOA, ARE YOU SEEING THIS?! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?!
I'M READING LIFE SIGNS! LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THIS THING!
I'M ACTIVATING THE CLAW-- WE'VE GOT TO REPORT THIS TO THE COALITION!
AIR LOCKS ARE CLOSED! OUR PASSENGER IS ON BOARD!
LET'S GO CHECK HIM OUT!
WHOA!
M-M-M--
--MORE.
HE'S HUGE!

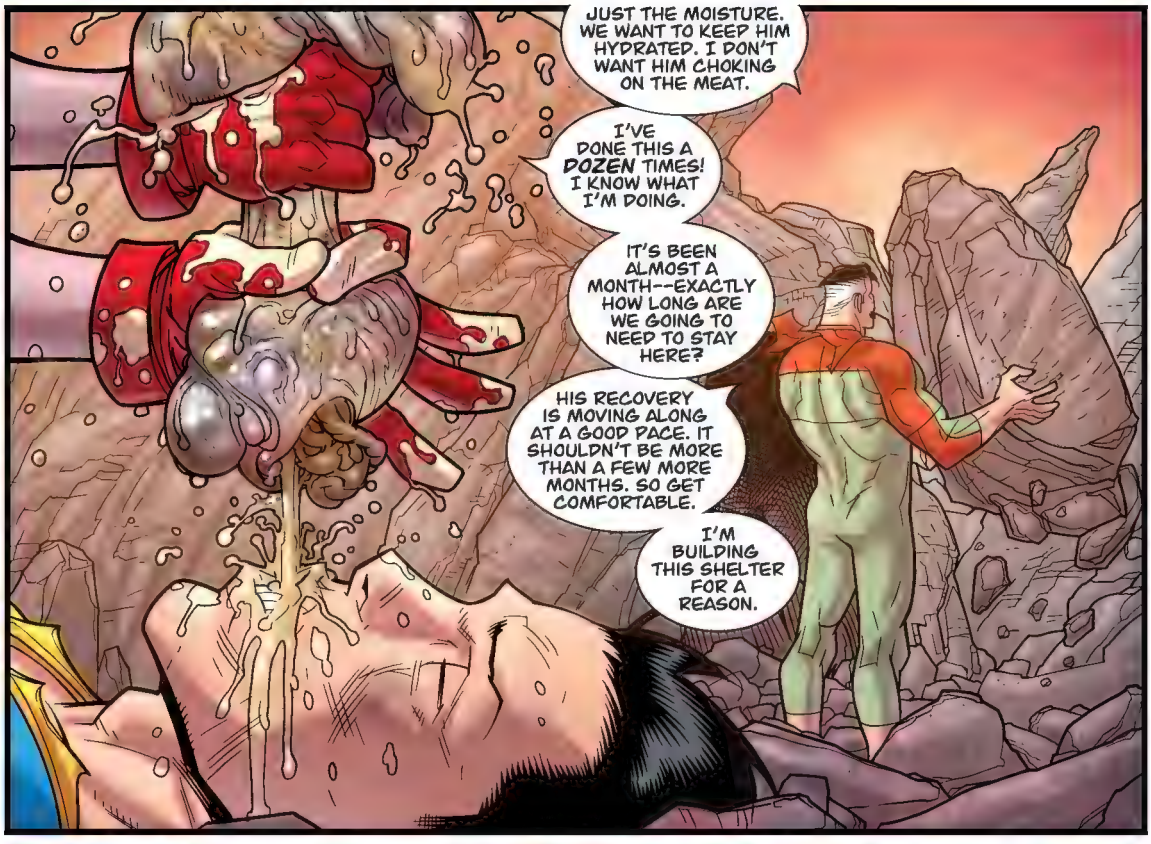
TALESCRIA.
SORRY TO DISTURB YOU, GRAND THAEDUS, BUT YOU ARE NEEDED.
I WILL JOIN YOU IN A MOMENT.
WE'VE BEEN BUSY WHILE NOLAN AND ALLEN WERE ON THEIR MISSION TO EARTH. THE KLAXUS EXTRACT WE HARVESTED FROM THE SINLAK BEETLES HAS BEEN PROVEN EFFECTIVE AGAINST VILTRUMITE TISSUE, AND ALL COALITION TROOPS ARE BEING ARMED WITH KLAXUS EXTRACT-LACED ARMAMENTS.
WE STARTED ON THE DRIDELL OUTPOST, WHICH THE COUNCIL AGREED WOULD BE THE BEST STAGING GROUND FOR A FIRST STRIKE AGAINST VILTRUMITE HELD CIVILIZATIONS.
THE ATTACK ON CAPTAIN PIKELL'S SHIP WHILE RETURNING FROM EARTH IS SERVING AS THE FIRST STRIKE BY THE VILTRUMITES. IT DEMANDS A RESPONSE...
WE REQUIRE THE FINAL WORD FROM YOU, FOR THIS WAR TO BEGIN.
COMMENCE THE INITIAL ASSAULT.

KRAK!
KROOM!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I'M CATCHING DINNER.
WE'VE BEEN HERE ALMOST TWO WEEKS-- AREN'T YOU STARVING?
KRAGG!
NOT ENOUGH TO EAT THAT!
I WILL NEVER EAT THAT!
NEVER EVER.
...
EVER!

IS THERE ANY MORE?
WHAT?

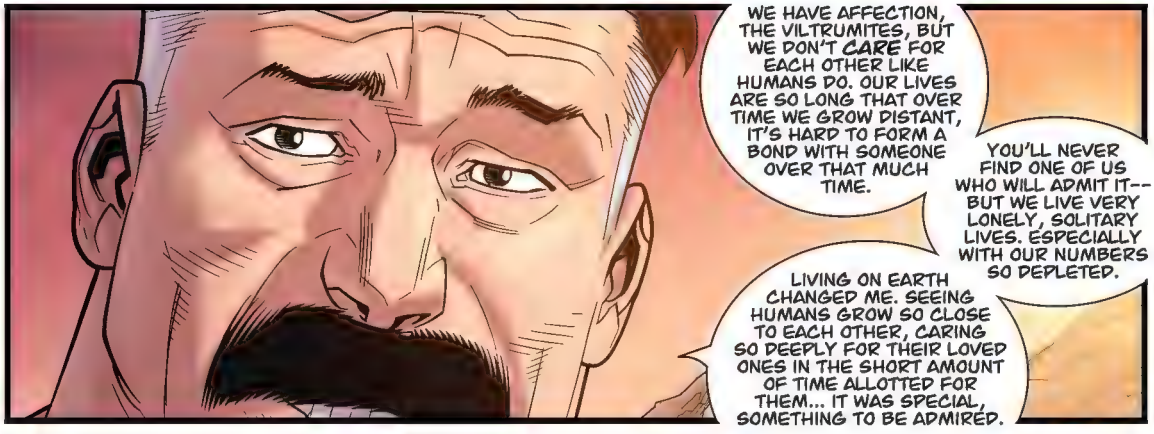
I MEAN-- JUST LOOK AT IT--ISN'T IT AWESOME?!
I CAN SEE IT, IT'S GREAT... REALLY. DO YOU HAVE TO KEEP BRINGING IT UP? IT'S JUST FACIAL HAIR.
THIS IS WORSE THAN WHEN YOU WERE EXPLAINING WHERE YOUR EXCREMENT WENT...
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, THE TECH JACKET CLEANS ME EVERY NIGHT. IT REMOVES BACTERIA FROM MY BODY. I HAVEN'T SHOWERED SINCE I GOT IT.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN SHAVING ME ALL THIS TIME, TOO! I HAD NO CLUE I'D STARTED GROWING FACIAL HAIR. THIS IS AWESOME. I THOUGHT I COULDN'T DO IT.
I'M TOTALLY GROWING A BEARD!
KRAKOOM!
WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT?!
I'VE GOT A TRACKING SIGNAL IN MY GEAR. IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE EXACT FREQUENCY IT'S UNDETECTABLE-- BUT IT CAN BE USED TO FIND ME IF I'M EVER LOST.
SO I BELIEVE THAT WAS THE CAVALRY SHOWING UP.

SWEET!

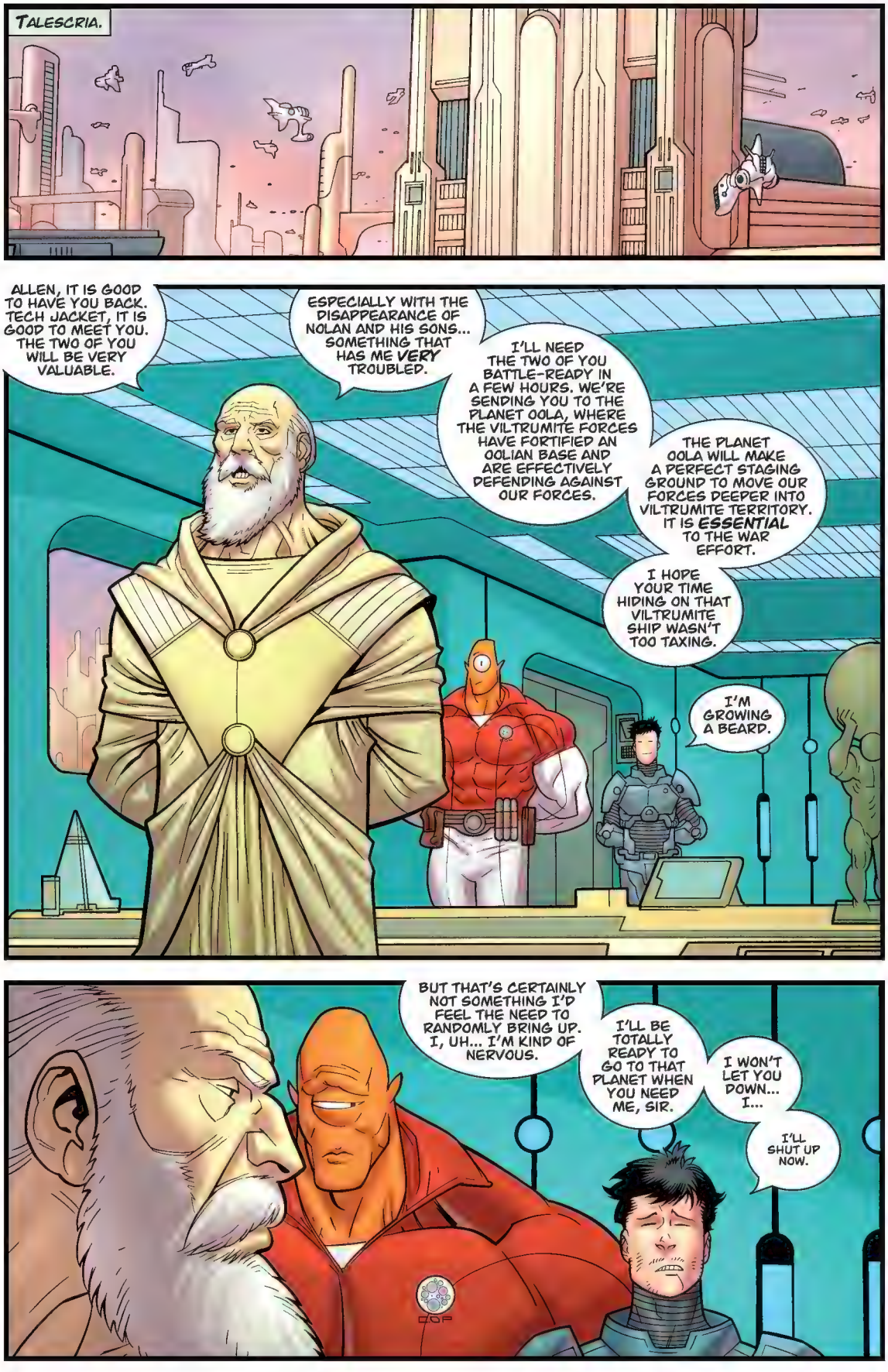

JUST THE MOISTURE. WE WANT TO KEEP HIM HYDRATED. I DON'T WANT HIM CHOKING ON THE MEAT.
I'VE DONE THIS A DOZEN TIMES! I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.
IT'S BEEN ALMOST A MONTH--EXACTLY HOW LONG ARE WE GOING TO NEED TO STAY HERE?
HIS RECOVERY IS MOVING ALONG AT A GOOD PACE. IT SHOULDN'T BE MORE THAN A FEW MORE MONTHS. SO GET COMFORTABLE.
I'M BUILDING THIS SHELTER FOR A REASON.

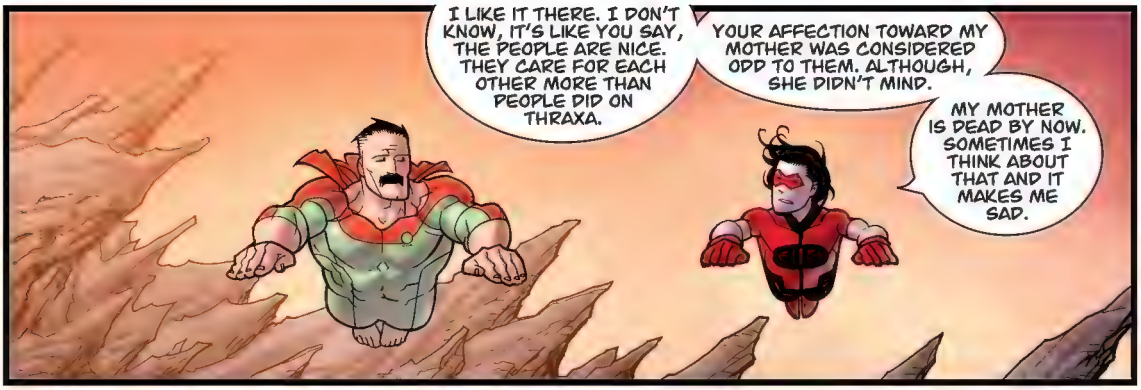
MY MOM, NOT MY REAL MOM, MY EARTH MOM, MARK'S MOM, UH--DEBBIE.
YOU REALLY THINK YOU LOVE HER?

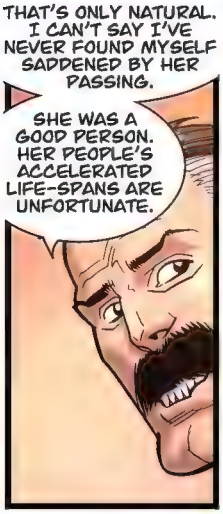
I KNOW I DO.
IT TOOK ME MONTHS OF HEALING IN A VILTRUMITE PRISON TO MAKE ME REALIZE IT... BUT YES, I DO.


WE HAVE AFFECTION, THE VILTRUMITES, BUT WE DON'T CARE FOR EACH OTHER LIKE HUMANS DO. OUR LIVES ARE SO LONG THAT OVER TIME WE GROW DISTANT, IT'S HARD TO FORM A BOND WITH SOMEONE OVER THAT MUCH TIME.
YOU'LL NEVER FIND ONE OF US WHO WILL ADMIT IT--BUT WE LIVE VERY LONELY, SOLITARY LIVES. ESPECIALLY WITH OUR NUMBERS SO DEPLETED.
LIVING ON EARTH CHANGED ME. SEEING HUMANS GROW SO CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, CARING SO DEEPLY FOR THEIR LOVED ONES IN THE SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME ALLOTTED FOR THEM... IT WAS SPECIAL, SOMETHING TO BE ADMIRED.

AT FIRST I WAS A SPECTATOR, WATCHING AS THEY LIVED THEIR LIVES. ACTING AS ONE OF THEM, GROWING CLOSE TO DEBBIE, PRETENDING TO FORM A BOND.
BUT WHY *HER?* DID I JUST PICK HER AT RANDOM?
AT FIRST I THOUGHT I HAD, I TOLD MYSELF THAT WAS THE ONLY WAY.
I COULDN'T ACTUALLY CARE FOR THIS FRAIL CREATURE.
BUT I *DID.* I HAD A CONNECTION TO HER.
WE HAD MARK, TOGETHER. RAISED HIM NOT AS A VILTRUMITE, BUT AS A HUMAN.
I THOUGHT I WAS BIDING MY TIME, WAITING TO SEE IF MARK DEVELOPED POWERS... WAITING TO SEE HOW HUMAN DNA MIXED WITH VILTRUMITE DNA... IF HE'D HAVE POWERS AND IF SO, HOW CLOSE TO VILTRUMITE STRENGTH HE WAS.
BUT I NEVER LOOKED AT THAT LIFE AS A CHORE. I *ENJOYED* IT.
OVER TIME, I FELL INTO THE ROLE OF HUMAN HUSBAND, HUMAN FATHER... SO MUCH SO THAT WHEN MARK GOT HIS POWERS...
...IT WAS A GREAT BURDEN MORE THAN ANYTHING.
I HAD TO GO BACK TO BEING A VILTRUMITE. I HAD TO DO WHAT I WAS PUT THERE TO DO.
WHETHER I WANTED TO OR NOT.
I SPENT A LOT OF TIME ALONE, THEN... CONSIDERING IF I COULD IGNORE MY DUTY, CONTINUE LIVING THE LIE I'D ENJOYED SO MUCH... WITH THE WOMAN I'D GROWN TO LOVE.
IN THE END... I CHOSE TO CARRY OUT MY MISSION... DESPITE HOW CONFLICTED I WAS.
THE DAMAGE I'VE DONE... THE PAIN I'VE CAUSED...
WHEN I LOOKED DOWN AT MARK, SAW HIM... BEATEN BY MY OWN HAND... A VILTRUMITE WOULD HAVE FELT NOTHING... BUT I WAS DEVASTATED.
I KNEW THEN THAT I'D MADE A MISTAKE... BUT I'D ALREADY GONE TOO FAR... IT WAS TOO LATE.


TALESCRIA.
ALLEN, IT IS GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK. TECH JACKET, IT IS GOOD TO MEET YOU. THE TWO OF YOU WILL BE VERY VALUABLE.
ESPECIALLY WITH THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NOLAN AND HIS SONS... SOMETHING THAT HAS ME VERY TROUBLED.
I'LL NEED THE TWO OF YOU BATTLE-READY IN A FEW HOURS. WE'RE SENDING YOU TO THE PLANET OOLA, WHERE THE VILTRUMITE FORCES HAVE FORTIFIED AN OOLIAN BASE AND ARE EFFECTIVELY DEFENDING AGAINST OUR FORCES.
THE PLANET OOLA WILL MAKE A PERFECT STAGING GROUND TO MOVE OUR FORCES DEEPER INTO VILTRUMITE TERRITORY. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO THE WAR EFFORT.
I HOPE YOUR TIME HIDING ON THAT VILTRUMITE SHIP WASN'T TOO TAXING.
I'M GROWING A BEARD.
BUT THAT'S CERTAINLY NOT SOMETHING I'D FEEL THE NEED TO RANDOMLY BRING UP. I, UH... I'M KIND OF NERVOUS.
I'LL BE TOTALLY READY TO GO TO THAT PLANET WHEN YOU NEED ME, SIR.
I WON'T LET YOU DOWN... I...
I'LL SHUT UP NOW.


I LIKE IT THERE. I DON'T KNOW, IT'S LIKE YOU SAY, THE PEOPLE ARE NICE. THEY CARE FOR EACH OTHER MORE THAN PEOPLE DID ON THRAXA.
YOUR AFFECTION TOWARD MY MOTHER WAS CONSIDERED ODD TO THEM. ALTHOUGH, SHE DIDN'T MIND.
MY MOTHER IS DEAD BY NOW. SOMETIMES I THINK ABOUT THAT AND IT MAKES ME SAD.

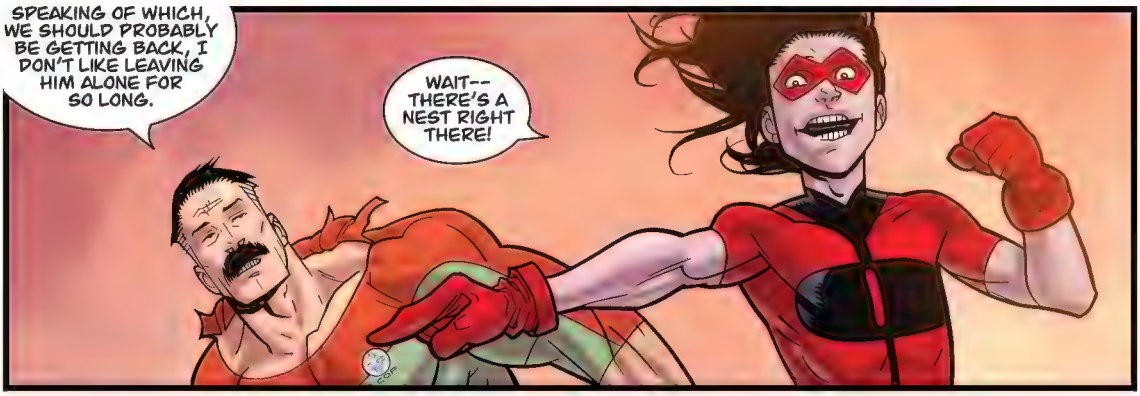

THAT'S ONLY NATURAL. I CAN'T SAY I'VE NEVER FOUND MYSELF SADDENED BY HER PASSING.
SHE WAS A GOOD PERSON. HER PEOPLE'S ACCELERATED LIFE-SPANS ARE UNFORTUNATE.

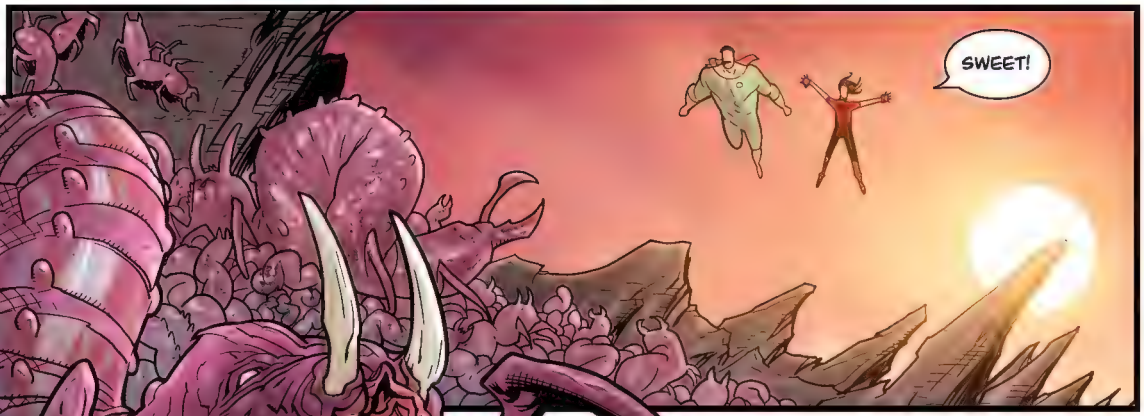
YOU'RE TELLING ME? I WAS A BABY LAST TIME I SAW YOU.
YOU THINK I DON'T THINK ABOUT MY LIFESPAN ALL THE TIME?

DON'T YOU WORRY ABOUT LIFESPAN. YOU'LL PROBABLY OUTLIVE ME. DESPITE YOUR GENETICS--YOU'LL STILL LIVE CENTURIES.
YOUR AGE HAS SLOWED CONSIDERABLY. BEFORE, I COULD WATCH YOU CHANGE FROM DAY TO DAY...NOT NOW. YOU'LL BE FINE.

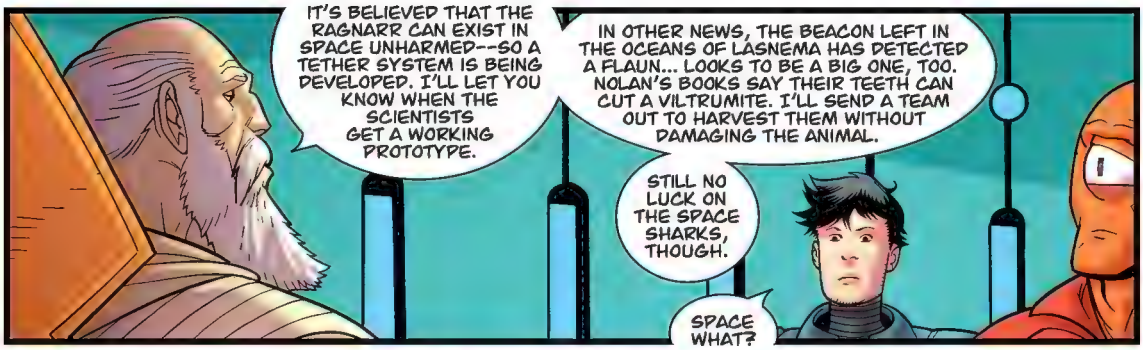
THE VILTRUMITES STILL VIEW ME AS INFERIOR--THEY WANTED TO KILL ME.
LET'S KICK THOSE GUYS' ASSES.

I PLAN TO.
WE'LL GET RIGHT ON THAT AS SOON AS MARK IS BACK IN FIGHTING FORM.

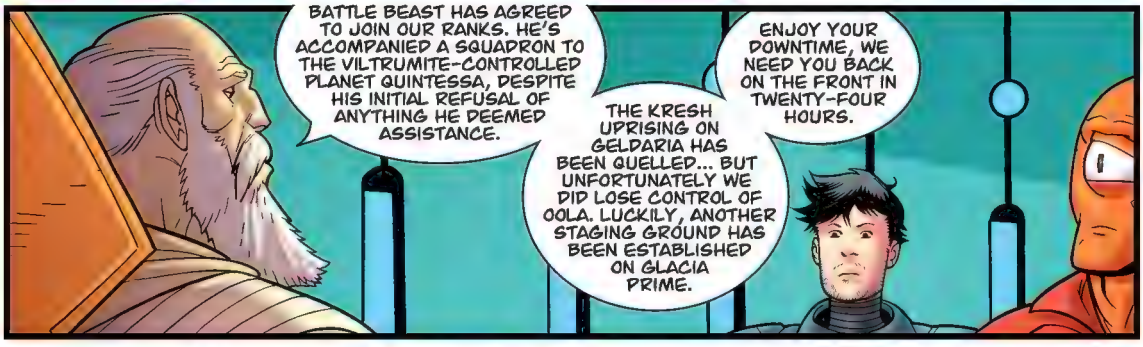

SPEAKING OF WHICH, WE SHOULD PROBABLY BE GETTING BACK, I DON'T LIKE LEAVING HIM ALONE FOR SO LONG.
WAIT--THERE'S A NEST RIGHT THERE!


SWEET!

YOU'RE NOT EVEN WAITING UNTIL YOU'RE HUNGRY TO EAT ANYMORE.
I LOVE THESE THINGS... I ACTUALLY LOOK FORWARD TO EATING.
I THINK I'M GAINING WEIGHT.
ATTACK!
ALL THE TIME-- I'M TELLING YOU IT'S ALL THE TIME!
THEY KNOW I'M IN THE HOUSE. IT'S CRAZY. I KNOW I DON'T HAVE SUPER HEARING BUT SHEESH.
IT'S AWFUL!
HA! HA! HA!
ABORT! ABORT!
THE SEDATIVE HAS ALREADY WORN OFF--THIS ISN'T WORKING, MAN THE ESCAPE PODS BEFORE YOUR SHIP LOSES PROPULSION!
HIS SPINE FEELS ALMOST COMPLETELY HEALED. HIS RECOVERY SHOULD SPEED UP NOW THAT HIS BODY ISN'T REBUILDING BONE.
HE MAY BE CONSCIOUS IN A MONTH OR SO.
ANOTHER MONTH?
HE'S OKAY, RIGHT? THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN GO WRONG... IS THERE?

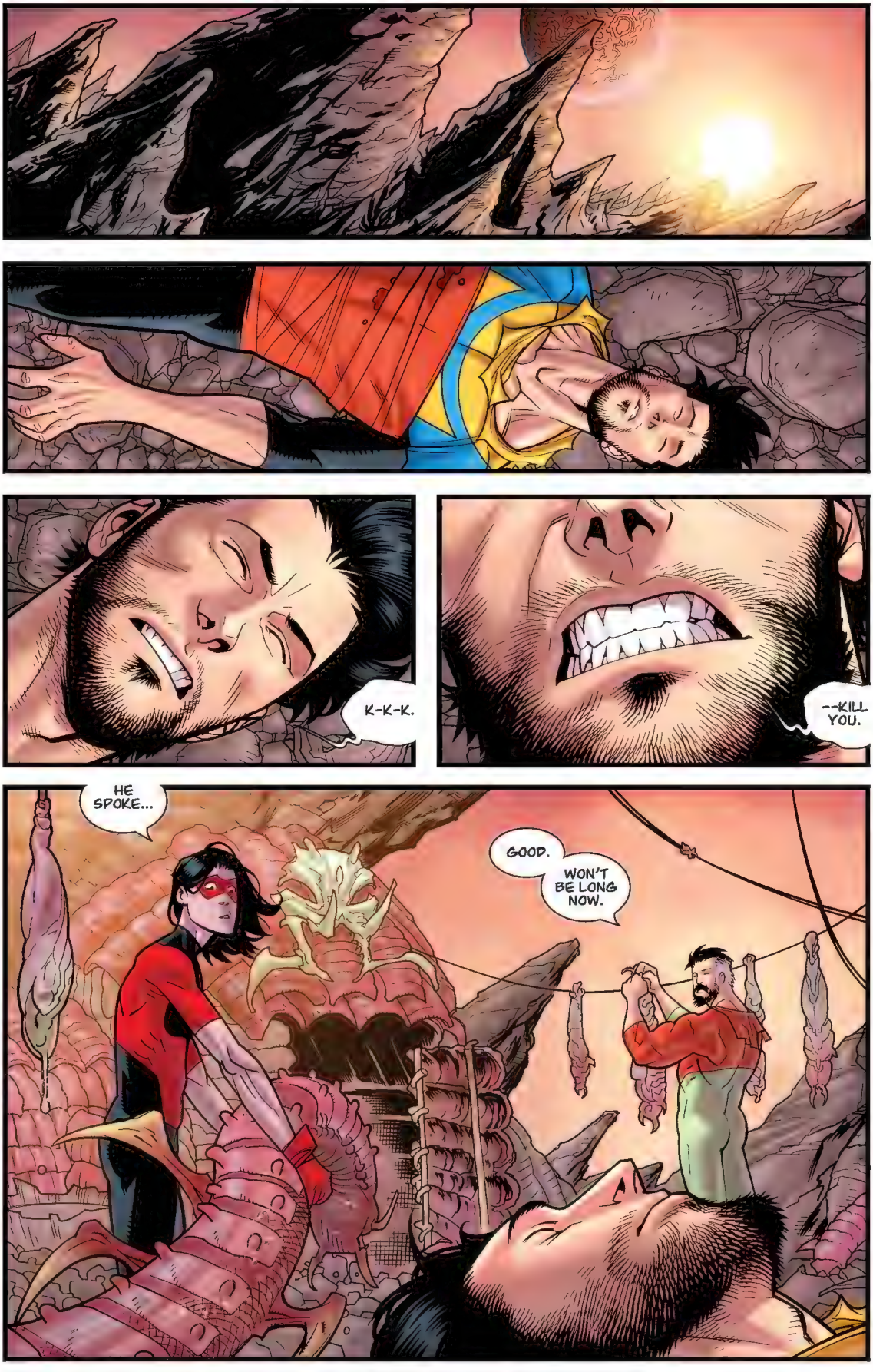

IT'S BELIEVED THAT THE RAGNARR CAN EXIST IN SPACE UNHARMED--SO A TETHER SYSTEM IS BEING DEVELOPED. I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN THE SCIENTISTS GET A WORKING PROTOTYPE.
IN OTHER NEWS, THE BEACON LEFT IN THE OCEANS OF LASNEMA HAS DETECTED A FLAUN... LOOKS TO BE A BIG ONE, TOO. NOLAN'S BOOKS SAY THEIR TEETH CAN CUT A VILTRUMITE. I'LL SEND A TEAM OUT TO HARVEST THEM WITHOUT DAMAGING THE ANIMAL.
STILL NO LUCK ON THE SPACE SHARKS, THOUGH.
SPACE WHAT?

DON'T HOLD BACK, JUST--
WRAMM!
HELL YEAH!


BATTLE BEAST HAS AGREED TO JOIN OUR RANKS. HE'S ACCOMPANIED A SQUADRON TO THE VILTRUMITE-CONTROLLED PLANET QUINTESSA, DESPITE HIS INITIAL REFUSAL OF ANYTHING HE DEEMED ASSISTANCE.
THE KRESH UPRISING ON GELDARIA HAS BEEN QUELLED... BUT UNFORTUNATELY WE DID LOSE CONTROL OF OOLA. LUCKILY, ANOTHER STAGING GROUND HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED ON GLACIA PRIME.
ENJOY YOUR DOWNTIME, WE NEED YOU BACK ON THE FRONT IN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

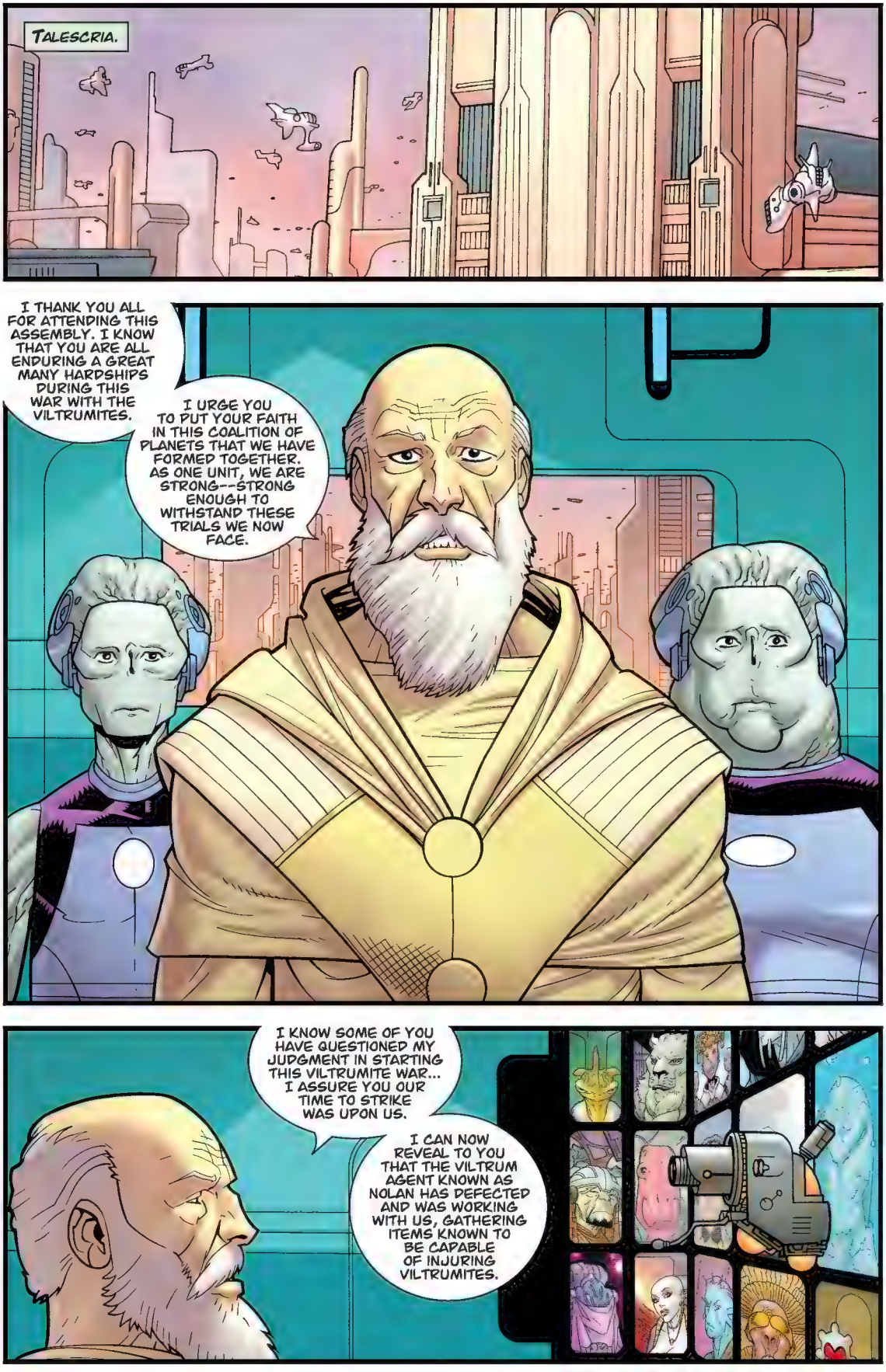
CAN'T--
DON'T TELL ME THAT--LOOK AT YOU--LOOK AT HOW MUCH STRONGER YOU'VE GOTTEN OVER THE LAST MONTH! YOU'VE GOT THIS!
KEEP GOING, OLIVER! YOU CAN DO IT!

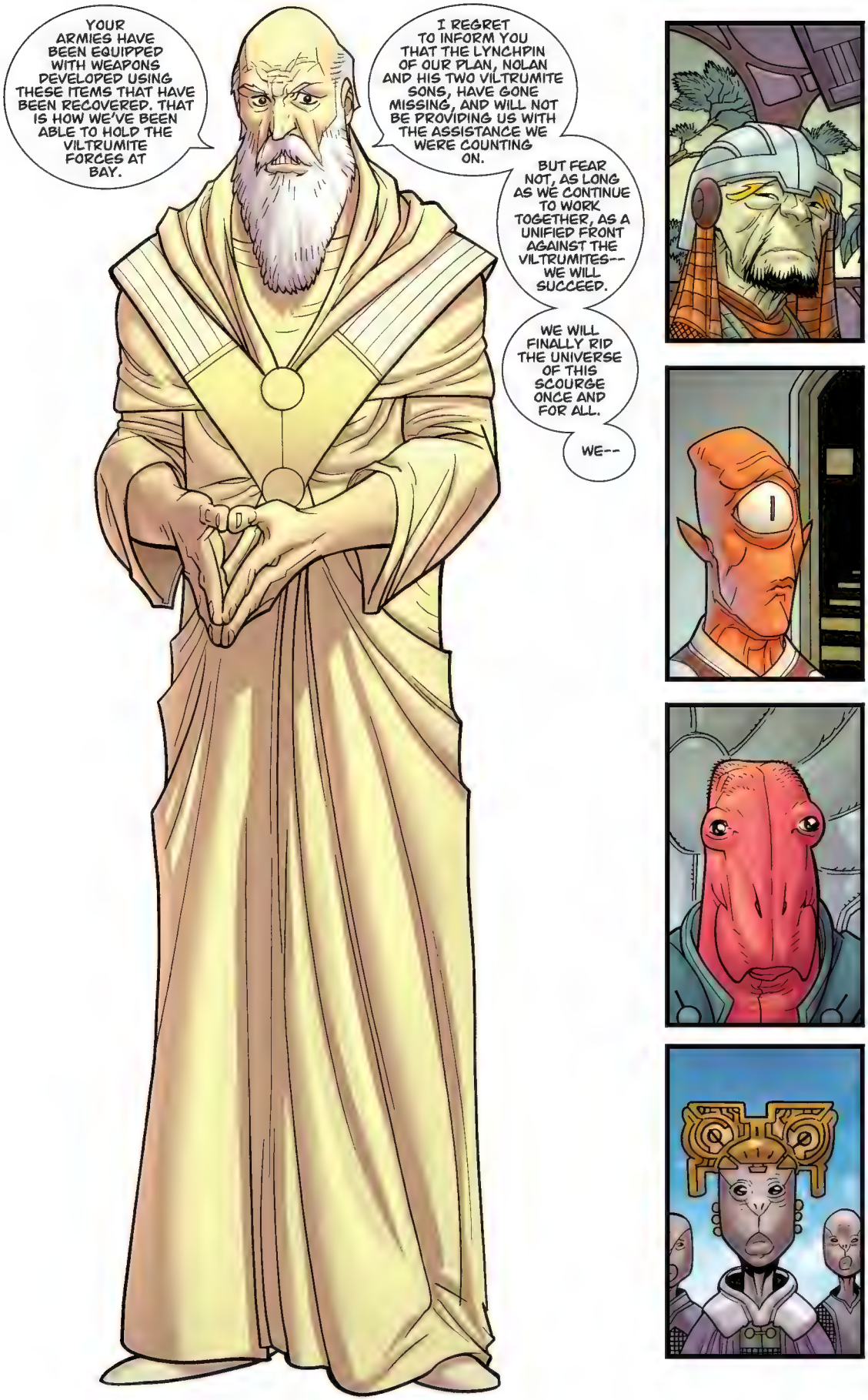
IT'S THREE STEPS FORWARD AND TWO STEPS BACK. OUR ARMIES ARE MORE THAN EFFECTIVE AGAINST THE FORCES OF THE VARIOUS VILTRUMITE-OCCUPIED PLANETS.
THE PROBLEM IS WE LACK HEAVY-HITTERS. WITH NOLAN, INVINCIBLE AND THE YOUNGER ONE ALL MISSING... WE'RE AT A LOSS WHEN THE VILTRUMITE AGENTS STATIONED WITHIN THESE WORLDS JOIN THE FIGHT.
THE TWO OF YOU, BATTLE BEAST, SPACE RACER, IT JUST ISN'T ENOUGH. I MAY HAVE TO SPLIT YOU TWO UP.


K-K-K.
--KILL YOU.
HE SPOKE...
GOOD.
WON'T BE LONG NOW.

THE FIGHTING ON DRAKUS MINOR HAS HALTED FOR THE MOMENT. COMMUNICATION COMING IN FROM GELDARIA INDICATES THINGS ARE QUIET IN THAT QUADRANT.
HELLO?
HOW ARE THINGS ON YOUR END?
BATTLE BEAST IS REFUSING A LEAVE PERIOD FOLLOWING HIS VICTORY OVER THE VILTRUMITES ON QUINTESSA. THAT ONE IS VERY DEDICATED.
YOU'VE BEEN FEEDING US INFORMATION FOR YEARS-- BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH. WE ARE STILL LOSING PLANETS TO THE COALITION.
THAT IS UNACCEPTABLE.
WE WILL STRIKE THE COALITION HEADQUARTERS ON TALESCRIA. YOU WILL SHUT DOWN THEIR DEFENSES AT THE TIME BEING TRANSMITTED TO YOU.
RESPOND.
IT WILL BE DONE.
WHAT? WHAT WILL BE DONE?
WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?

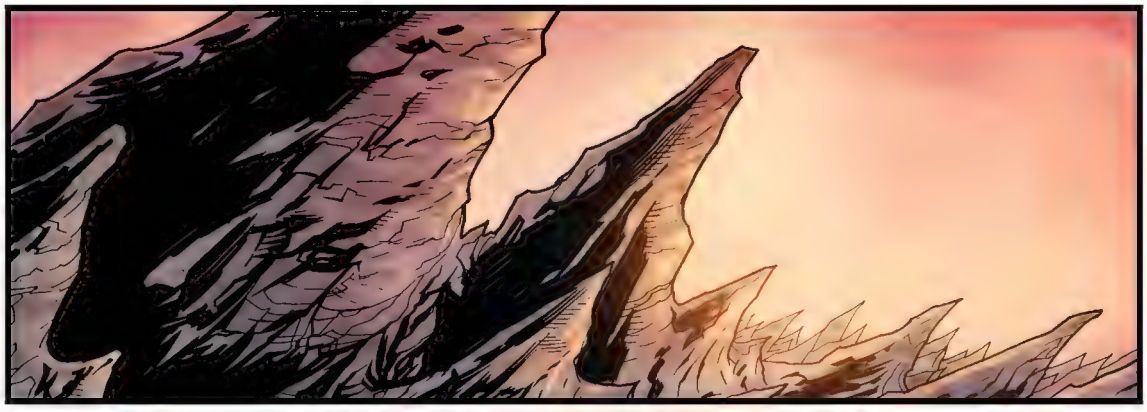
CHAPTER FOUR


TALESCRIA.
I THANK YOU ALL FOR ATTENDING THIS ASSEMBLY. I KNOW THAT YOU ARE ALL ENDURING A GREAT MANY HARDSHIPS DURING THIS WAR WITH THE VILTRUMITES.
I URGE YOU TO PUT YOUR FAITH IN THIS COALITION OF PLANETS THAT WE HAVE FORMED TOGETHER. AS ONE UNIT, WE ARE STRONG--STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND THESE TRIALS WE NOW FACE.
I KNOW SOME OF YOU HAVE QUESTIONED MY JUDGMENT IN STARTING THIS VILTRUMITE WAR... I ASSURE YOU OUR TIME TO STRIKE WAS UPON US.
I CAN NOW REVEAL TO YOU THAT THE VILTRUM AGENT KNOWN AS NOLAN HAS DEFECTED AND WAS WORKING WITH US, GATHERING ITEMS KNOWN TO BE CAPABLE OF INJURING VILTRUMITES.


YOUR ARMIES HAVE BEEN EQUIPPED WITH WEAPONS DEVELOPED USING THESE ITEMS THAT HAVE BEEN RECOVERED. THAT IS HOW WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO HOLD THE VILTRUMITE FORCES AT BAY.
I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT THE LYNCHPIN OF OUR PLAN, NOLAN AND HIS TWO VILTRUMITE SONS, HAVE GONE MISSING, AND WILL NOT BE PROVIDING US WITH THE ASSISTANCE WE WERE COUNTING ON.
BUT FEAR NOT, AS LONG AS WE CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER, AS A UNIFIED FRONT AGAINST THE VILTRUMITES-- WE WILL SUCCEED.
WE WILL FINALLY RID THE UNIVERSE OF THIS SCOURGE ONCE AND FOR ALL.
WE--

DOOM!
WHAT IS--?!

KROOM!

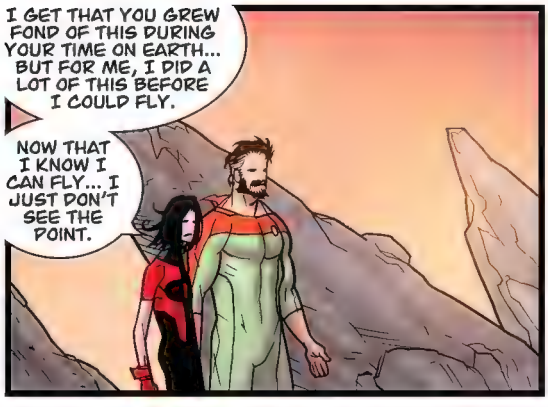


...I'M STILL VERY YOUNG BY THEIR STANDARDS, NOT THAT HUMAN KIDS MY CURRENT AGE DON'T HAVE RELATIONSHIPS OF SOME KIND. IT'S JUST... THEIR PARAMETERS OF ATTRACTION ARE SO NARROW.
I REMEMBER MY TIME ON THRAXA... I REMEMBER THOSE PEOPLE... FINDING SOME OF THEM TO BE ATTRACTIVE, EVEN AS YOUNG AS I WAS.
THERE'S NOTHING LIKE THAT ON EARTH. I FIND SOME EARTH PEOPLE ATTRACTIVE, BUT IT'S ONLY THE MOST UNIQUE AMONG THEM.

MOTHER TOOK ME TO A RESTAURANT ONE TIME THAT HAD A LOBSTER TANK...

I MEAN, I STILL ATE ONE... BUT I THOUGHT IT WAS... BEAUTIFUL.

THERE ARE SOME GIRLS I COULD INTRODUCE YOU TO ON TALESCRIA. THE DAUGHTER OF THE WOMAN WHO LIVES NEXT TO ME IN MY BUILDING HAS A... SIMILAR APPEARANCE.
HAVE YOU ENJOYED YOUR WALK?

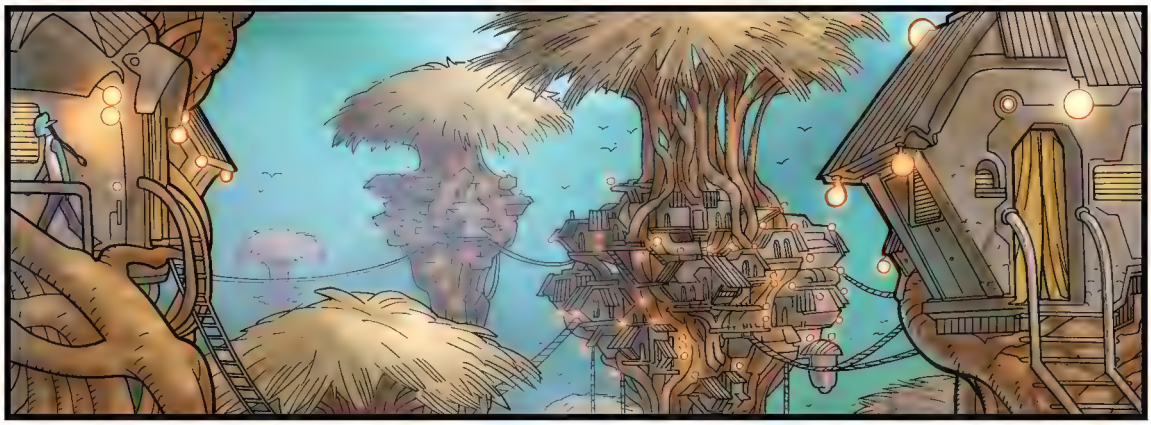

I GET THAT YOU GREW FOND OF THIS DURING YOUR TIME ON EARTH... BUT FOR ME, I DID A LOT OF THIS BEFORE I COULD FLY.
NOW THAT I KNOW I CAN FLY... I JUST DON'T SEE THE POINT.

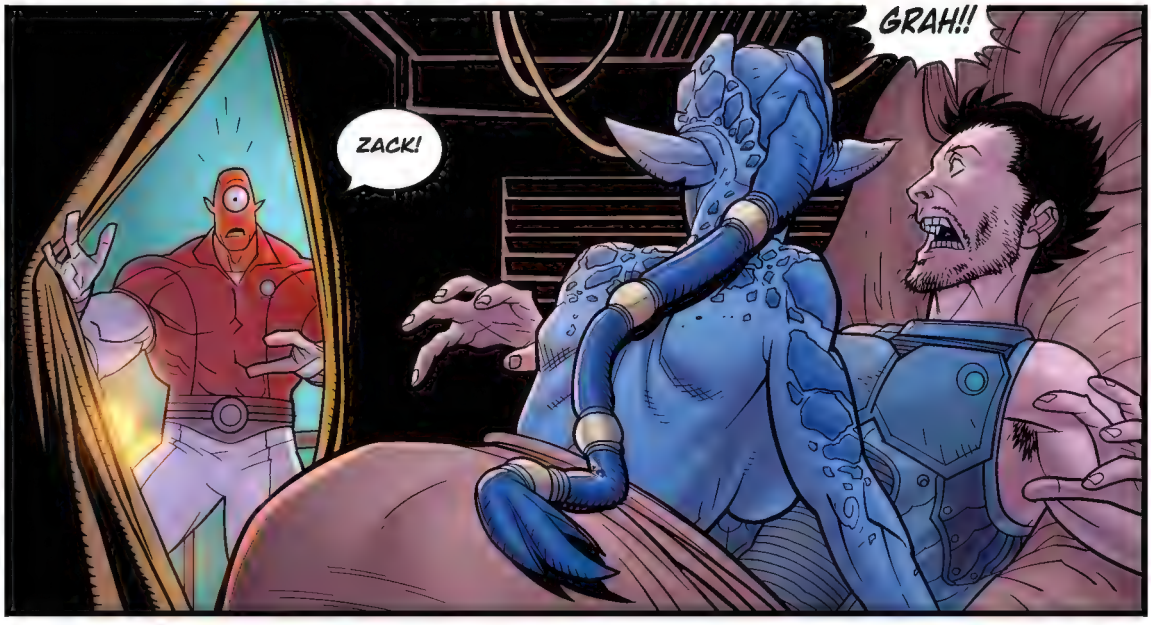
IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE. YOU SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY WHEN--
DAD?
AHEAD, IN THE CAMP. WHAT IS--?!

MARK?!

DID...
WHERE'S CONQUEST?
DID YOU KILL HIM?

NO, SON...
YOU DID.
YOU KICKED HIS ASS!

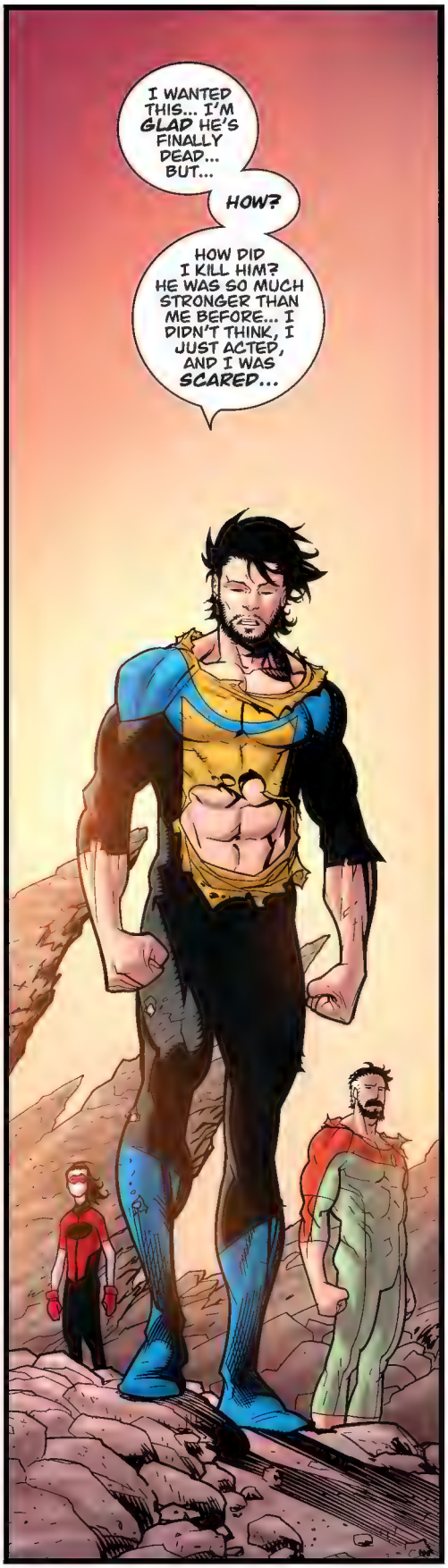


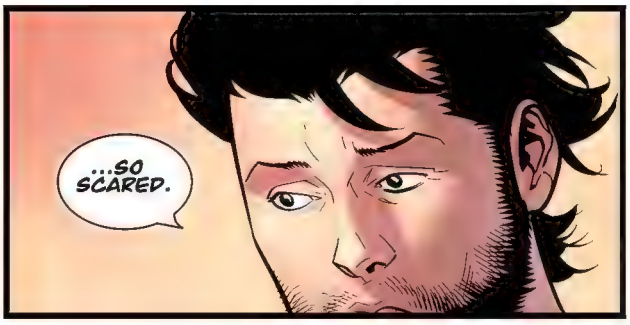

ZACK!
GRAH!!

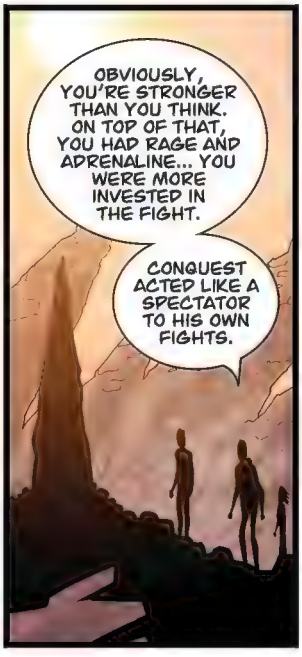
I THOUGHT YOU HAD A GIRLFRIEND...
...THAT GELDARIAN GIRL?

KIND OF... BUT NO. WE AGREED TO SEE OTHER PEOPLE LAST TIME I SAW HER. IT WAS HER IDEA...
WE DON'T HAVE COMPATIBLE...
...PARTS.

PLEASE STOP SAYING THE THINGS THAT COME INTO YOUR HEAD FIRST WHEN I TALK TO YOU. DON'T--Y'KNOW WHAT... JUST STOP ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS.
AND GET READY--WE'VE GOT A DISTRESS CALL FROM TALESCRIA.

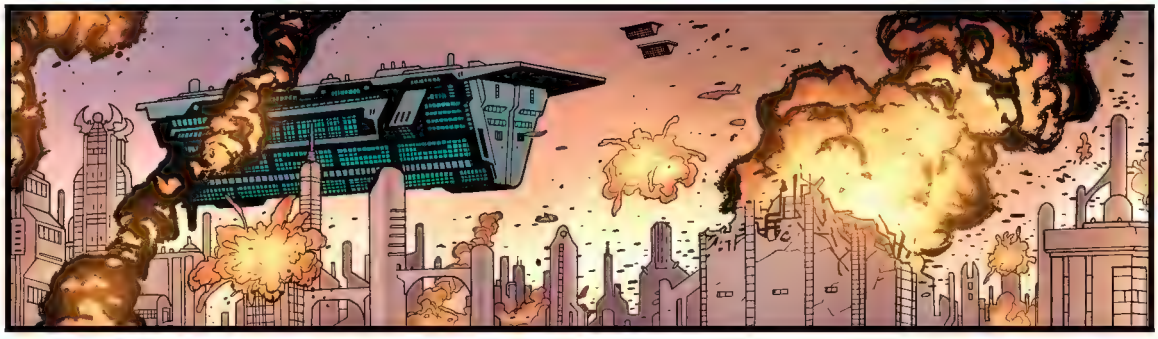

I WANTED THIS... I'M GLAD HE'S FINALLY DEAD... BUT...
HOW?
HOW DID I KILL HIM? HE WAS SO MUCH STRONGER THAN ME BEFORE... I DIDN'T THINK, I JUST ACTED, AND I WAS SCARED...

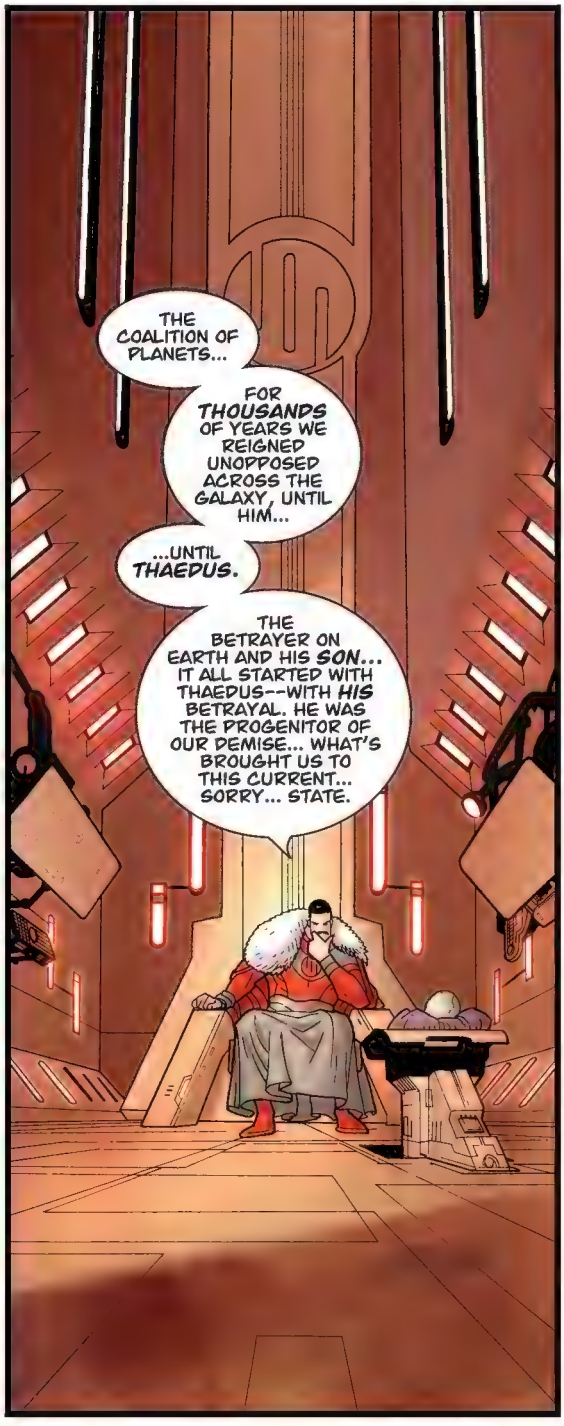

...SO SCARED.

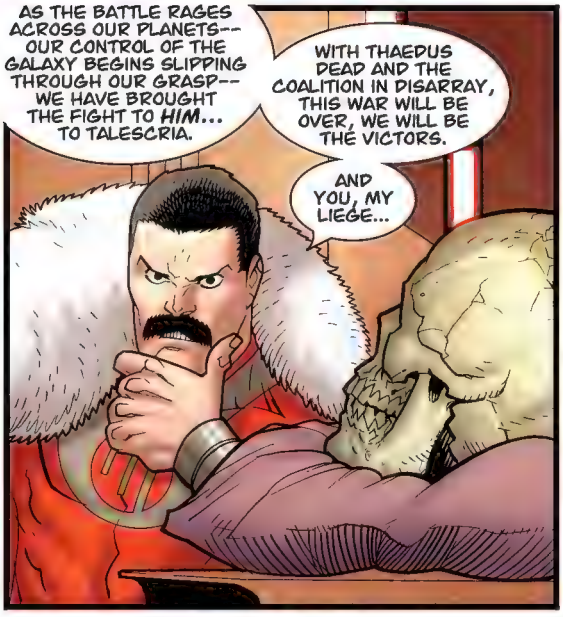

OBVIOUSLY, YOU'RE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK. ON TOP OF THAT, YOU HAD RAGE AND ADRENALINE... YOU WERE MORE INVESTED IN THE FIGHT.
CONQUEST ACTED LIKE A SPECTATOR TO HIS OWN FIGHTS.

I WASN'T GOING TO KILL ANYMORE. UGH. THAT DIDN'T LAST VERY LONG.
SON, THIS IS WAR...

...AND IT'S TIME FOR US TO REJOIN THE FIGHT.



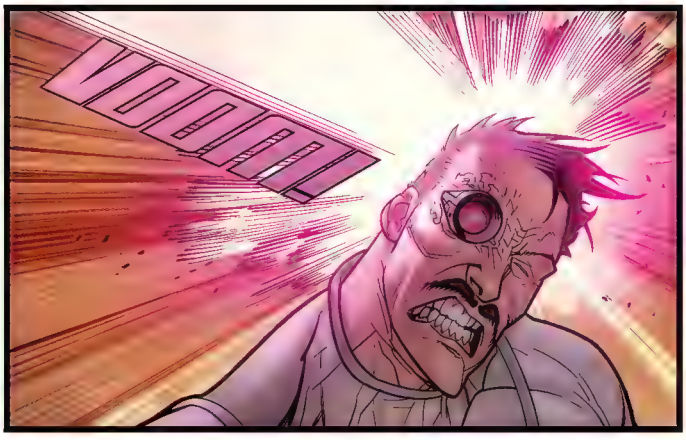

THE COALITION OF PLANETS...
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS WE REIGNED UNOPPOSED ACROSS THE GALAXY, UNTIL HIM...
...UNTIL THAEDUS.
THE BETRAYER ON EARTH AND HIS SON... IT ALL STARTED WITH THAEDUS--WITH HIS BETRAYAL. HE WAS THE PROGENITOR OF OUR DEMISE... WHAT'S BROUGHT US TO THIS CURRENT... SORRY... STATE.

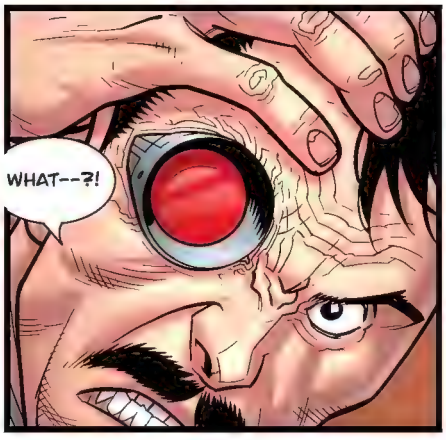

AS THE BATTLE RAGES ACROSS OUR PLANETS-- OUR CONTROL OF THE GALAXY BEGINS SLIPPING THROUGH OUR GRASP-- WE HAVE BROUGHT THE FIGHT TO HIM... TO TALESCRIA.
WITH THAEDUS DEAD AND THE COALITION IN DISARRAY, THIS WAR WILL BE OVER, WE WILL BE THE VICTORS.
AND YOU, MY LIEGE...

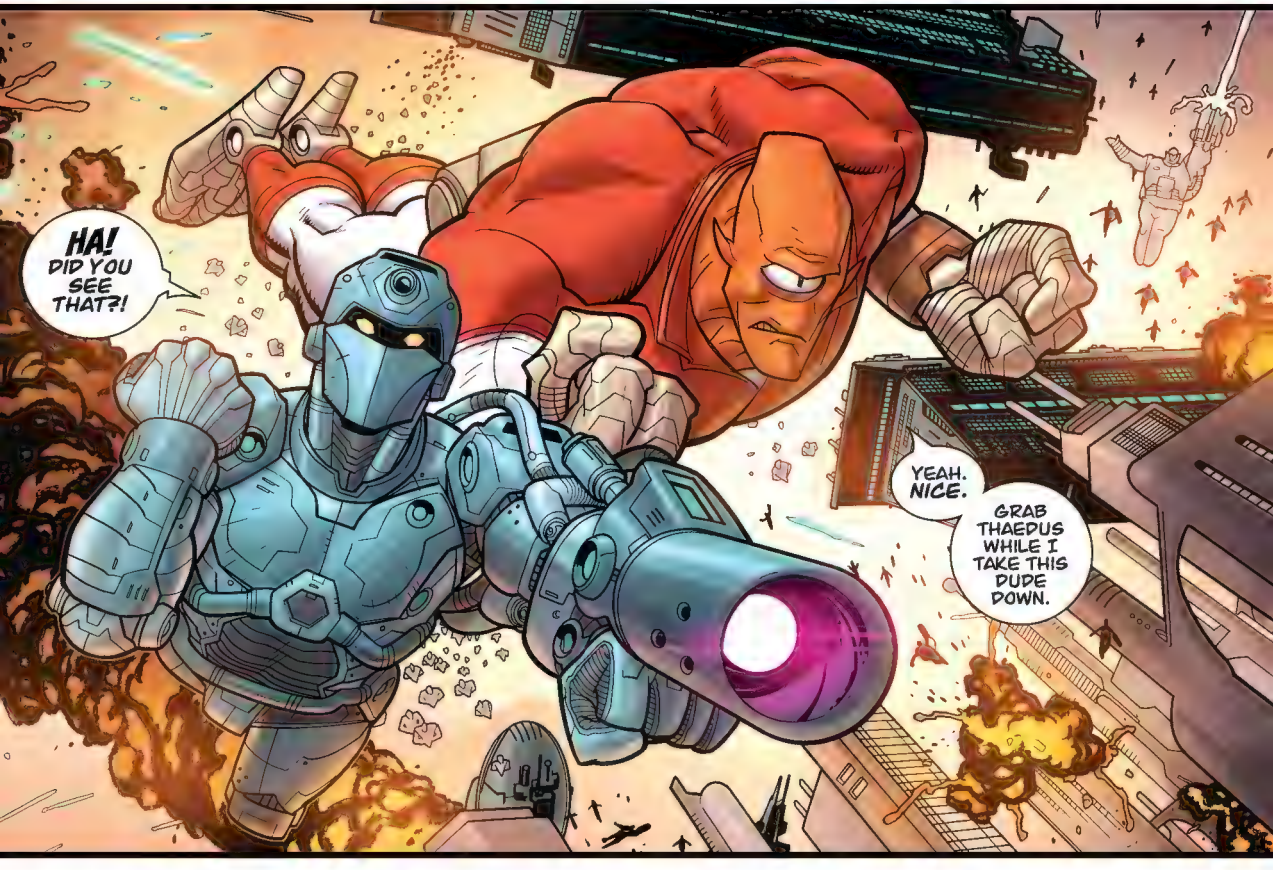
...YOU WILL BE AVENGED.

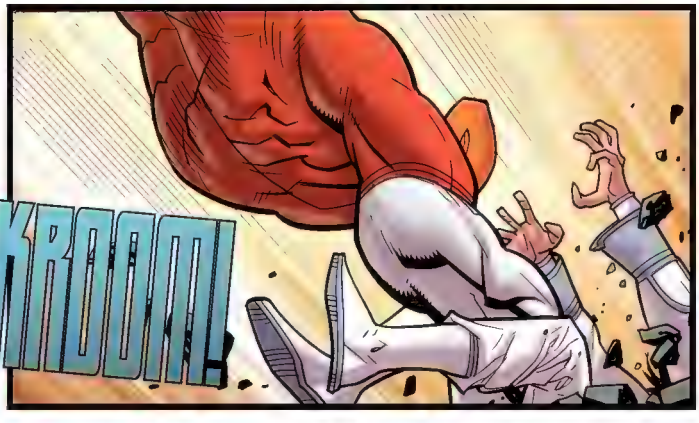
THE TRAITOR...
IT HAD TO BE...
71-
YOU!
HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?!
HOW?!
NO...
NOT ME...

NO, PLEASE NO--
SOMEBODY HELP ME!!
KRAKKK!
WRAMM!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT HIM--
--YOU'VE GOT YOUR OWN PROBLEMS.
WRAKKOOM!


VOOM!


WHAT--?!

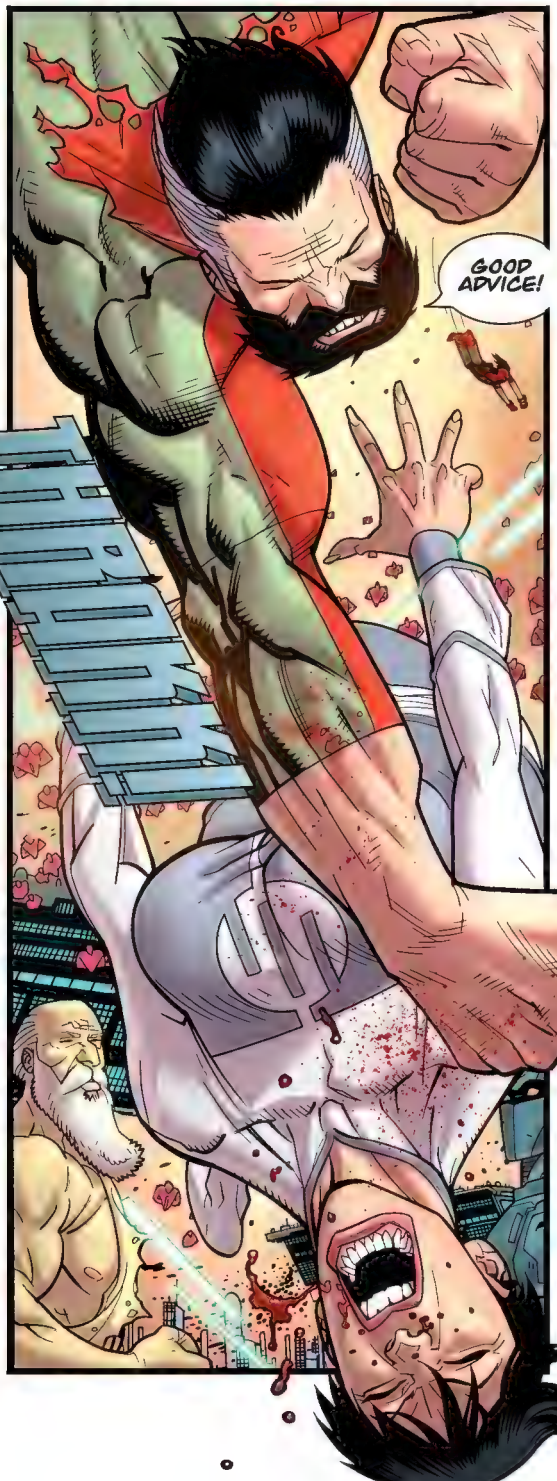

HA! DID YOU SEE THAT?!
YEAH. NICE.
GRAB THAEDUS WHILE I TAKE THIS DUDE DOWN.


KROOM!

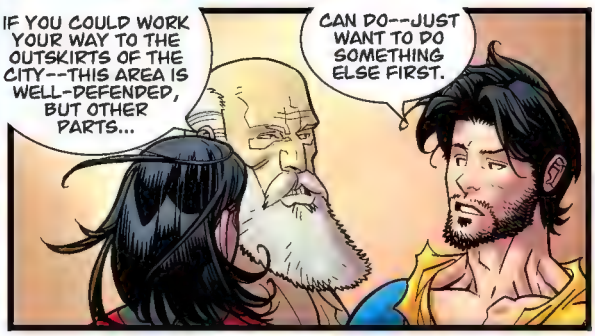
I GOT YOU, MAN. IT'S ALL GOOD!

WHOOM!
I'LL SEE YOUR WEAK BODY SPILL THROUGH THE SEAMS OF YOUR TECHNOLOGY, GELDARIAN!
EXTERIOR PRESSURE AT 90% CAPACITY, BREACH IMMINENT.
KRUK!
TH--THANKS...
FOOLISH UNOPAN, YOU DEFY US EVEN AS YOUR BELOVED COALITION CRUMBLES AROUND YOU!
DUDE, YOU'RE CLUELESS--WE'VE GOT YOUR CRAPPY EMPIRE ON THE ROPES!
BEFORE SHE GETS UP--WE GOTTA HELP ALLEN.
NO, ALLEN CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF. WE MUST FLEE, GATHER WHAT TROOPS WE CAN TO REGROUP. OUR CAUSE IS ALL BUT LOST.
I NEVER CONSIDERED THEY'D FIND US HERE--I'VE SPREAD US TOO THIN...
IT'S OVER...
WAIT--
LOOK!

PAY ATTENTION WHEN SOMEONE KILLS YOU!


GOOD ADVICE!

THESE GUYS WERE ENSLAVED--TRY TO DISABLE THEIR WEAPONS WITHOUT HURTING THEM.
DOING MY BEST.


IF YOU COULD WORK YOUR WAY TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY--THIS AREA IS WELL-DEFENDED, BUT OTHER PARTS...
CAN DO--JUST WANT TO DO SOMETHING ELSE FIRST.

KEEP UP WITH ME--AND KEEP YOUR FISTS OUT IN FRONT OF YOU.
I KNOW HOW TO FLY--WHAT ARE WE--?

OH--

THRAKKA-BRAKKA-BA-DOOM!!

NO!

NO!

TRAITOR!

YOU'RE A DISGRACE!

WHAT HAVE THEY DONE? FOLLOW ME--

NOW!

YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR ME, UNOPAN!

THEN WHY AREN'T I-- DEAD?!

WE CAN'T LET THE SHIP FALL-- HELP ME!

OH, BALLS!

GOOD.

WE'VE GOT HELP.

PUSH!

PUSH?! PUSH IT WHERE?!

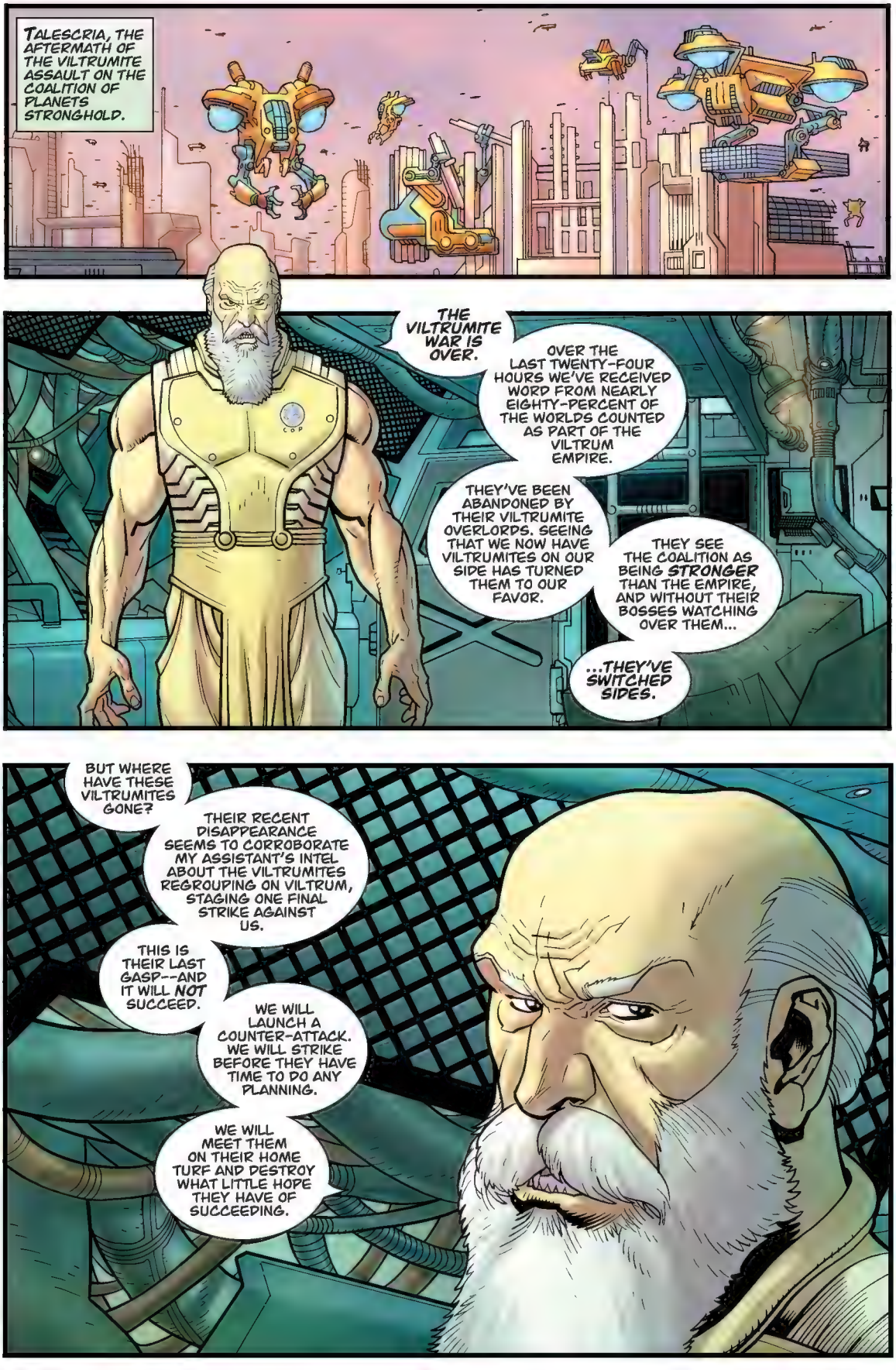
SPACE.

THIS IS NOT WHAT HAPPENS--THIS ISN'T POSSIBLE--WHERE--I'LL KILL THEM--
--I'LL DESTROY THEM!
WHAT?
HOW?
...WHERE ARE THE VILTRUMITES?!
NO--CAN'T RISK IT.

UGH... UH...
NOLAN-- HEY!
WHERE DID THEY...?
GONE.
WITHOUT THE VILTRUMITES-- THEY'RE SCREWED AND THEY KNOW IT. THEY'RE JUST GIVING UP.
LOOK.
WE SHARED A BRAIN FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF OUR LIVES! WE DEDICATED OURSELVES TO THE COALITION TOGETHER! HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?!
HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?!

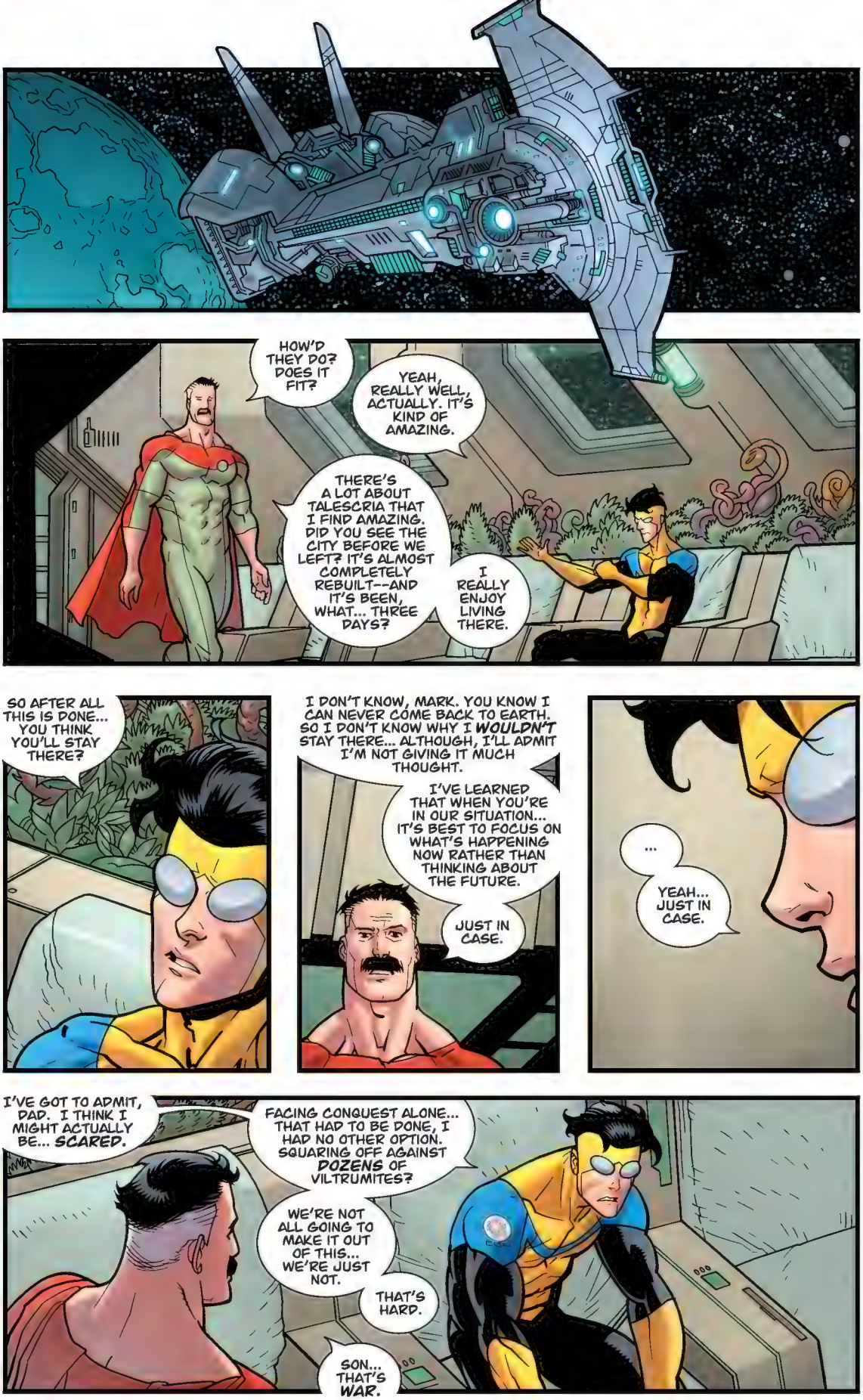
VZAM!
LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO! YOU THINK I WANTED THIS?! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WERE WORKING FOR THEM!
TALK! TELL ME WHAT THE VILTRUMITES' PLANS ARE! TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW.
DON'T MAKE ME SHOOT YOU AGAIN!
ENOUGH.
LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE--YOU BROUGHT THEM HERE, YOU CAUSED THIS DESTRUCTION--YOU'VE BETRAYED US ALL.
YOU WILL PAY FOR THESE CRIMES--BUT FIRST, TELL US WHERE THE VILTRUMITES ARE GOING--RIGHT NOW.
DOESN'T MATTER NOW--DOESN'T MATTER AT ALL.
IT'S TOO LATE, YOU'VE GOT NO HOPE OF WINNING THIS WAR. THEY SAID--THEY--
IF THIS BATTLE WAS LOST, THEY WERE TO RECONVENE ON THE PLANET VILTRUM TO STAGE A COUNTER-ATTACK.
YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE. THEY'RE ALL GOING THERE--
ALL OF THEM.
IT'S OVER.

CHAPTER FIVE
RYAN 10
RANSOM
+fco


TALESCRIA, THE AFTERMATH OF THE VILTRUMITE ASSAULT ON THE COALITION OF PLANETS STRONGHOLD.
THE VILTRUMITE WAR IS OVER.
OVER THE LAST TWENTY-FOUR HOURS WE'VE RECEIVED WORD FROM NEARLY EIGHTY-PERCENT OF THE WORLDS COUNTED AS PART OF THE VILTRUM EMPIRE.
THEY'VE BEEN ABANDONED BY THEIR VILTRUMITE OVERLORDS. SEEING THAT WE NOW HAVE VILTRUMITES ON OUR SIDE HAS TURNED THEM TO OUR FAVOR.
THEY SEE THE COALITION AS BEING STRONGER THAN THE EMPIRE, AND WITHOUT THEIR BOSSES WATCHING OVER THEM...
...THEY'VE SWITCHED SIDES.
BUT WHERE HAVE THESE VILTRUMITES GONE?
THEIR RECENT DISAPPEARANCE SEEMS TO CORROBORATE MY ASSISTANT'S INTEL ABOUT THE VILTRUMITES REGROUPING ON VILTRUM, STAGING ONE FINAL STRIKE AGAINST US.
THIS IS THEIR LAST GASP--AND IT WILL NOT SUCCEED.
WE WILL LAUNCH A COUNTER-ATTACK. WE WILL STRIKE BEFORE THEY HAVE TIME TO DO ANY PLANNING.
WE WILL MEET THEM ON THEIR HOME TURF AND DESTROY WHAT LITTLE HOPE THEY HAVE OF SUCCEEDING.

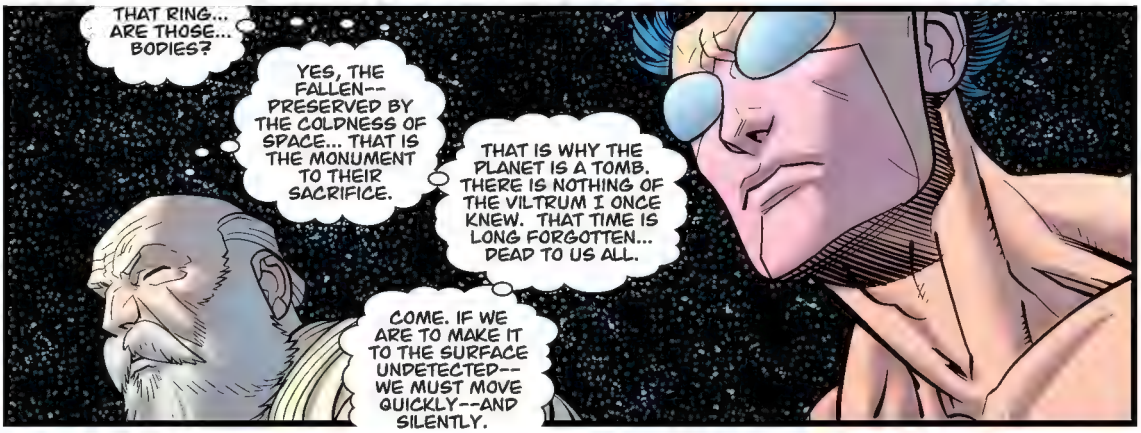
ARE YOU READY TO FINISH THIS?

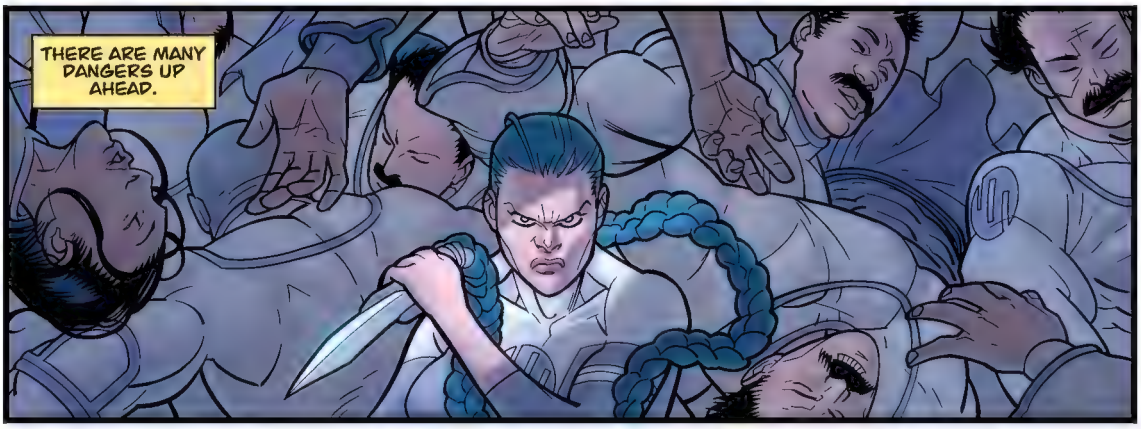
HELL YEAH!


HOW'D THEY DO? DOES IT FIT?
YEAH, REALLY WELL, ACTUALLY. IT'S KIND OF AMAZING.
THERE'S A LOT ABOUT TALESCRIA THAT I FIND AMAZING. DID YOU SEE THE CITY BEFORE WE LEFT? IT'S ALMOST COMPLETELY REBUILT--AND IT'S BEEN, WHAT... THREE DAYS?
I REALLY ENJOY LIVING THERE.
SO AFTER ALL THIS IS DONE... YOU THINK YOU'LL STAY THERE?
I DON'T KNOW, MARK. YOU KNOW I CAN NEVER COME BACK TO EARTH. SO I DON'T KNOW WHY I WOULDN'T STAY THERE... ALTHOUGH, I'LL ADMIT I'M NOT GIVING IT MUCH THOUGHT.
I'VE LEARNED THAT WHEN YOU'RE IN OUR SITUATION... IT'S BEST TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW RATHER THAN THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE.
JUST IN CASE.
...
YEAH... JUST IN CASE.
I'VE GOT TO ADMIT, DAD. I THINK I MIGHT ACTUALLY BE... SCARED.
FACING CONQUEST ALONE... THAT HAD TO BE DONE, I HAD NO OTHER OPTION. SQUARING OFF AGAINST DOZENS OF VILTRUMITES?
WE'RE NOT ALL GOING TO MAKE IT OUT OF THIS... WE'RE JUST NOT.
THAT'S HARD.
SON... THAT'S WAR.

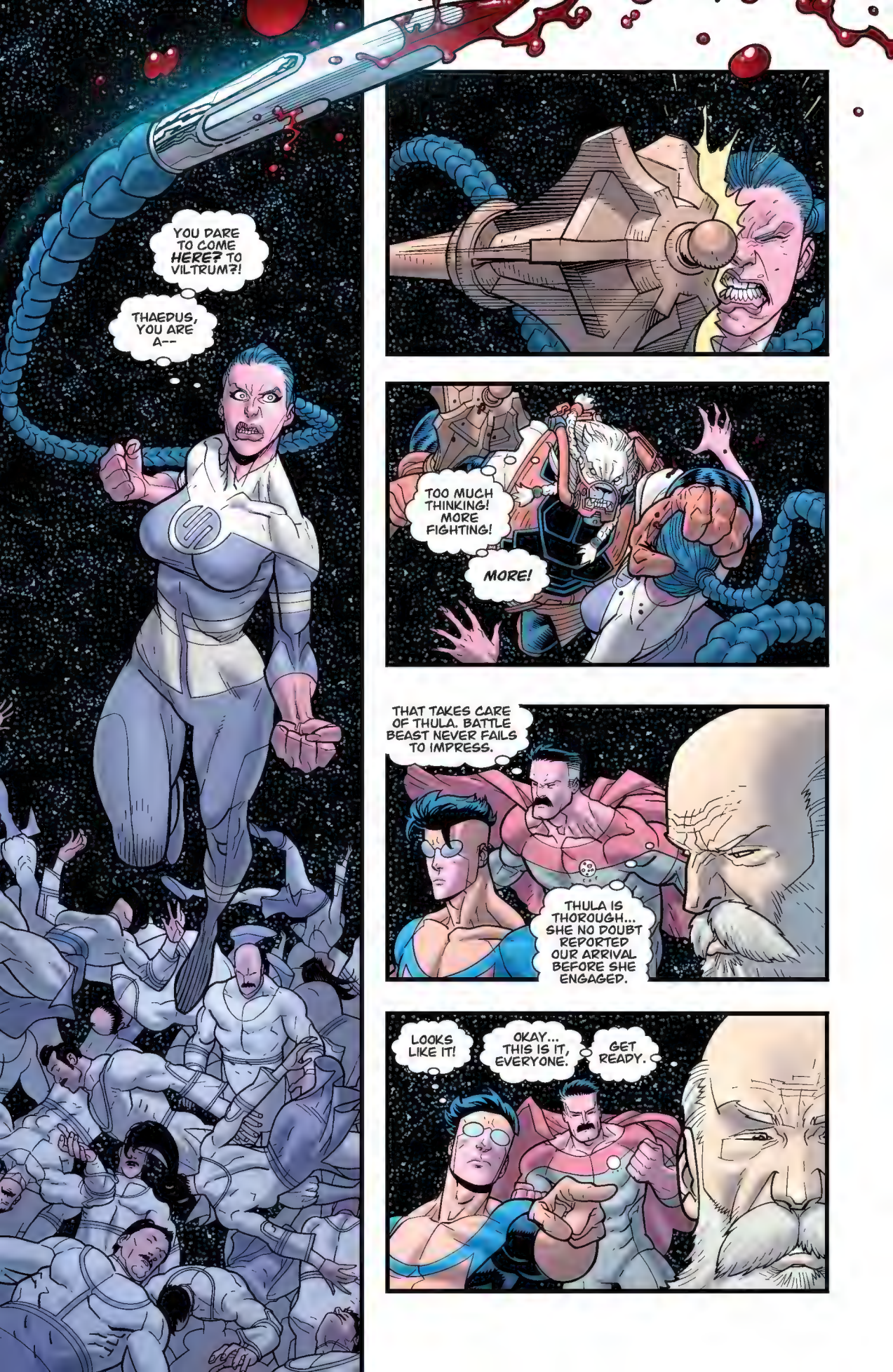
HEY, WHERE'S THAT DUDE WITH THE HANDS FOR FEET? I THOUGHT HE WAS AWESOME. HE'S NOT COMING WITH US?
YOU MEAN SPACE RACER?
HE'S GOING TO BE MEETING US THERE. HE HAD TO... PICK SOMETHING UP.
PICK WHAT UP? WHAT COULD HE POSSIBLY BE GETTING?
IT WOULD TAKE FAR TOO MUCH EXPLANATION. I THINK IT BEST THAT IT REMAIN A SURPRISE.
TRUST ME.
WE ARE MINUTES AWAY. I NEED EVERYONE TO GATHER IN THE MAIN HANGER.
IT'S TIME.
WELL... NO TURNING BACK NOW, RIGHT?
...
RELAX, HE'S KIDDING.
NO I WASN'T.

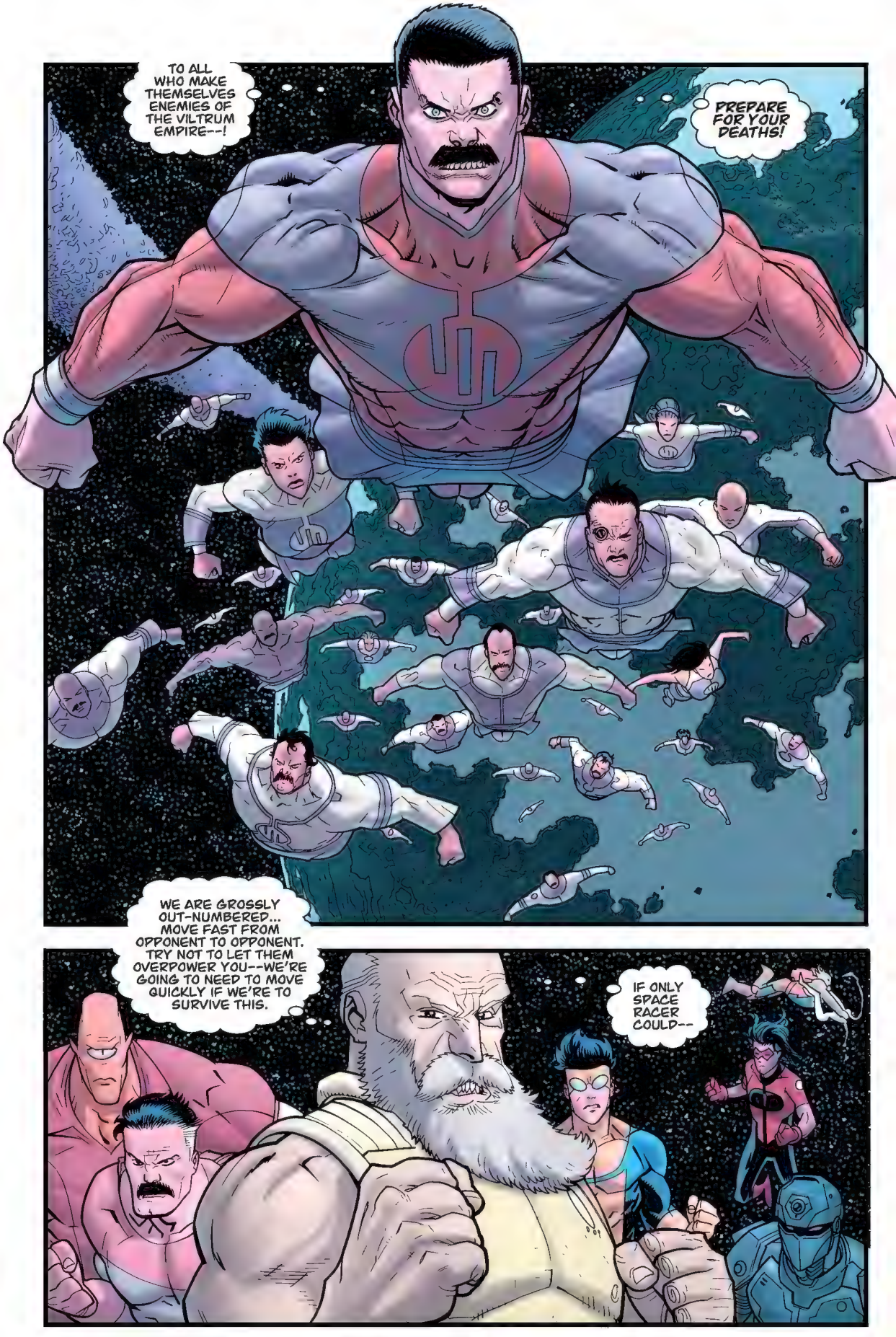
WHY DIDN'T WE GO STRAIGHT TO THE PLANET?
THE PLANET VILTRUM IS A TOMB.
IT'S A MONUMENT TO THOSE WHO FELL VICTIM TO THE SCOURGE VIRUS.
THERE ARE MANY REASONS THE VILTRUMITES WOULD CHOOSE VILTRUM AS A STAGING GROUND.
THE SYMBOLISM OF RETURNING TO THE HOME WORLD BEING CHIEF AMONG THEM. BUT AS A MEMORIAL TO THOSE FALLEN, THE PLANET HOUSES A NUMBER OF DEFENSES.
IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE OUR WAY TO THE PLANET ON OUR OWN LIKE THIS...
BUT, TO DO SO IN A SPACE SHIP-- WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE.

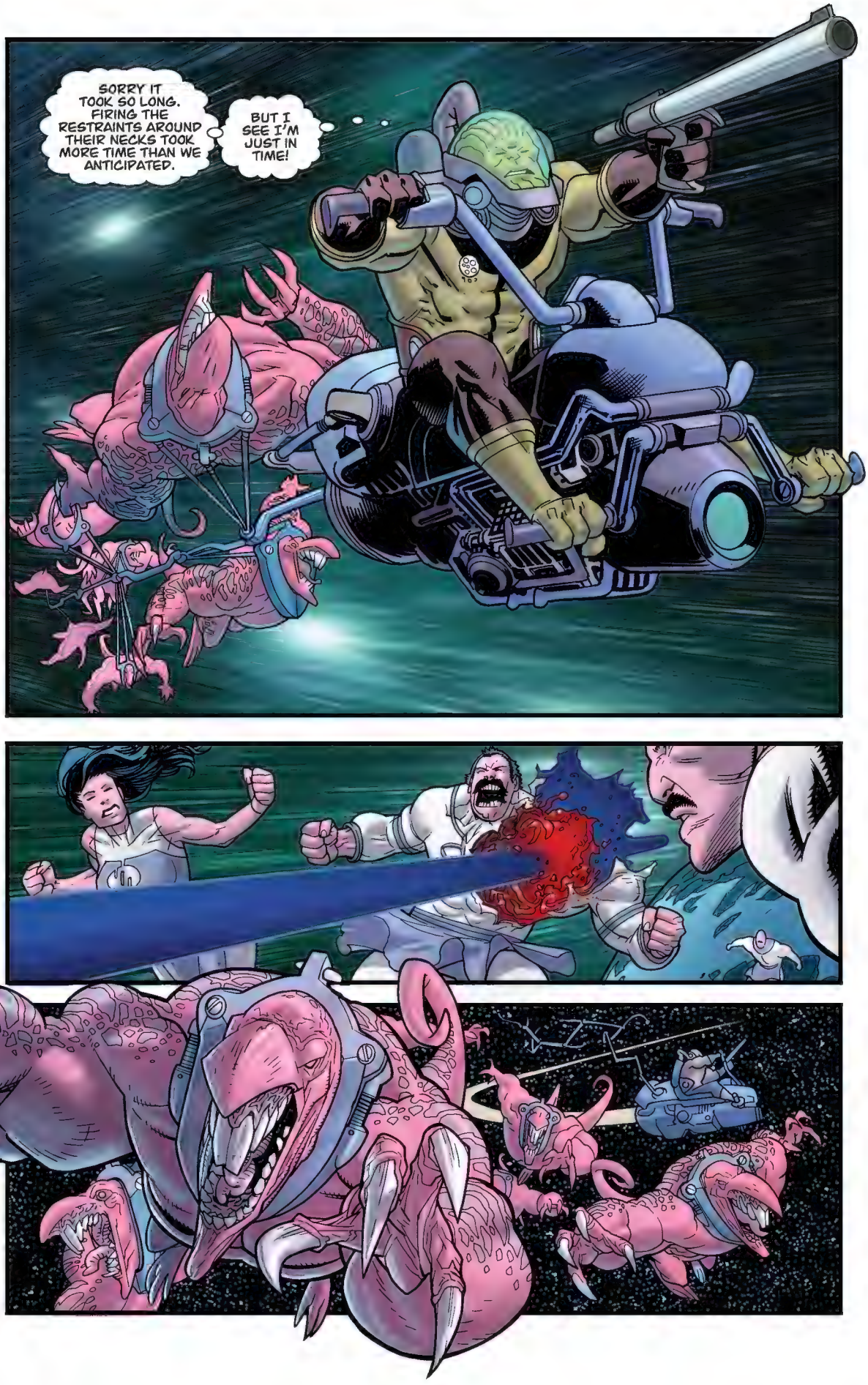

THAT RING... ARE THOSE... BODIES?
YES, THE FALLEN-- PRESERVED BY THE COLDNESS OF SPACE... THAT IS THE MONUMENT TO THEIR SACRIFICE.
THAT IS WHY THE PLANET IS A TOMB. THERE IS NOTHING OF THE VILTRUM I ONCE KNEW. THAT TIME IS LONG FORGOTTEN... DEAD TO US ALL.
COME. IF WE ARE TO MAKE IT TO THE SURFACE UNDETECTED-- WE MUST MOVE QUICKLY--AND SILENTLY.

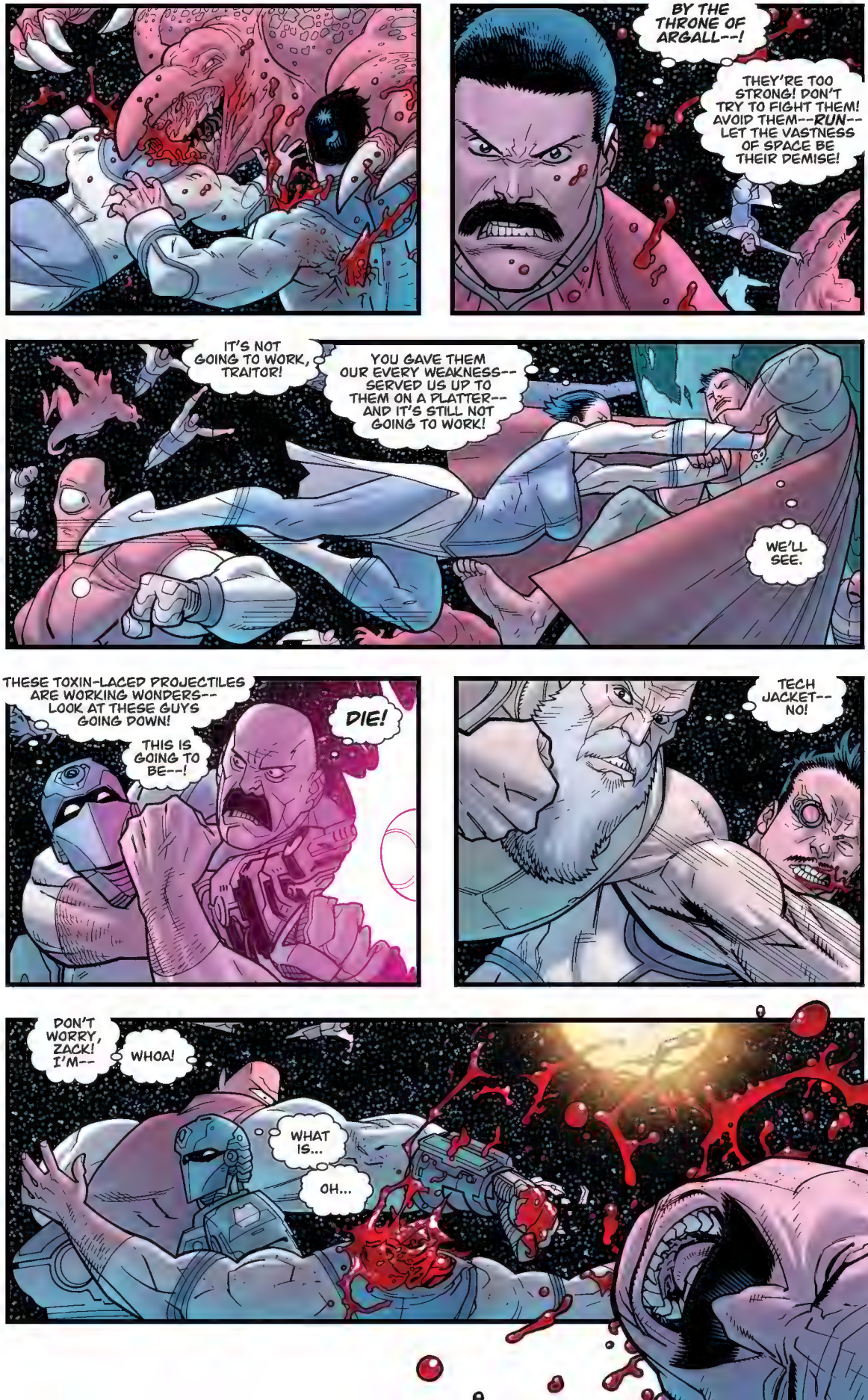

THERE ARE MANY DANGERS UP AHEAD.

THIS IS SO...
SHH.


YOU DARE TO COME HERE? TO VILTRUM?!
THAEDUS, YOU ARE A--
TOO MUCH THINKING! MORE FIGHTING!
MORE!
THAT TAKES CARE OF THULA. BATTLE BEAST NEVER FAILS TO IMPRESS.
THULA IS THOROUGH... SHE NO DOUBT REPORTED OUR ARRIVAL BEFORE SHE ENGAGED.
LOOKS LIKE IT!
OKAY... THIS IS IT, EVERYONE.
GET READY.

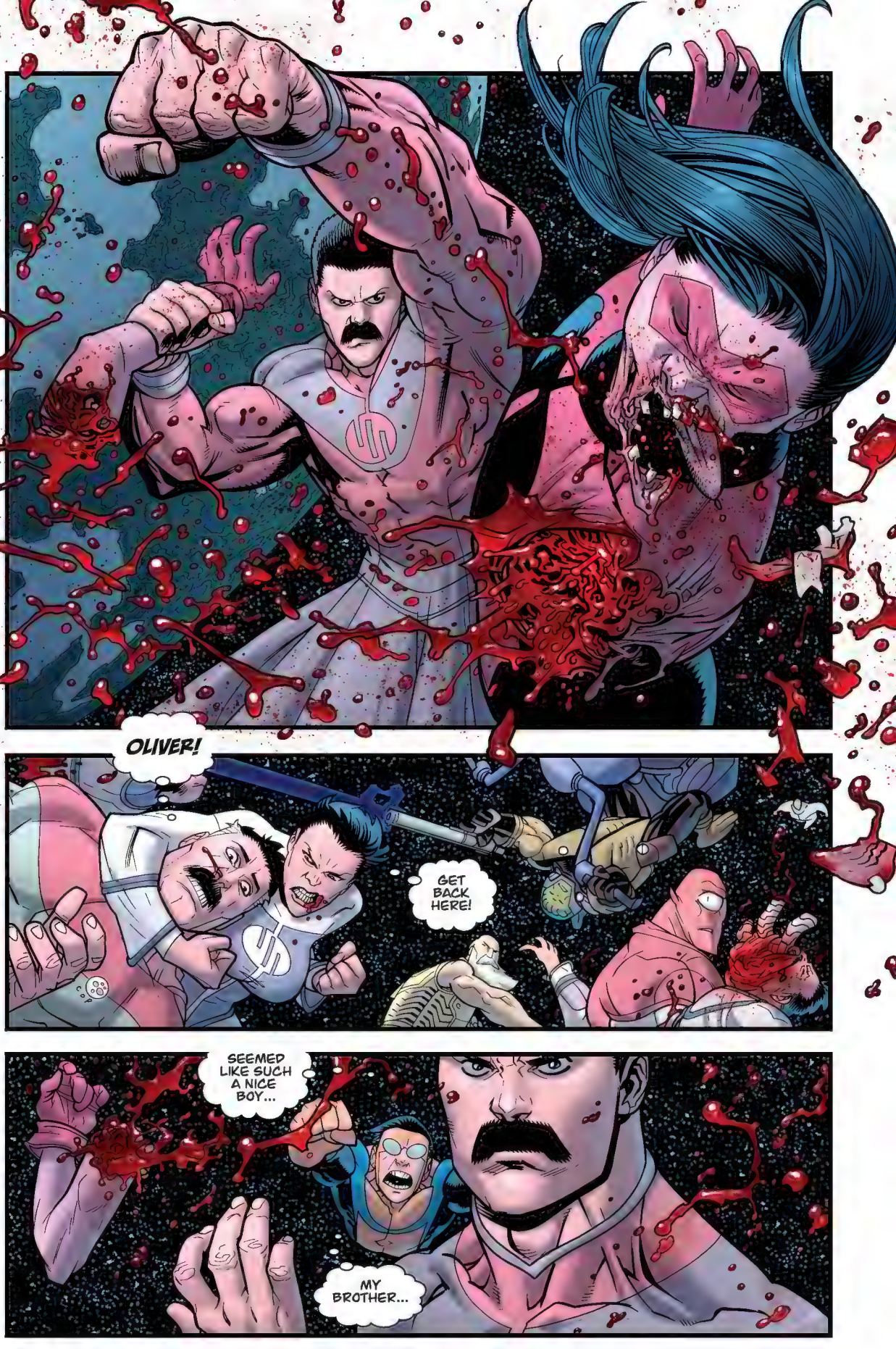

TO ALL WHO MAKE THEMSELVES ENEMIES OF THE VILTRUM EMPIRE--!
PREPARE FOR YOUR DEATHS!
WE ARE GROSSLY OUT-NUMBERED... MOVE FAST FROM OPPONENT TO OPPONENT. TRY NOT TO LET THEM OVERPOWER YOU--WE'RE GOING TO NEED TO MOVE QUICKLY IF WE'RE TO SURVIVE THIS.
IF ONLY SPACE RACER COULD--

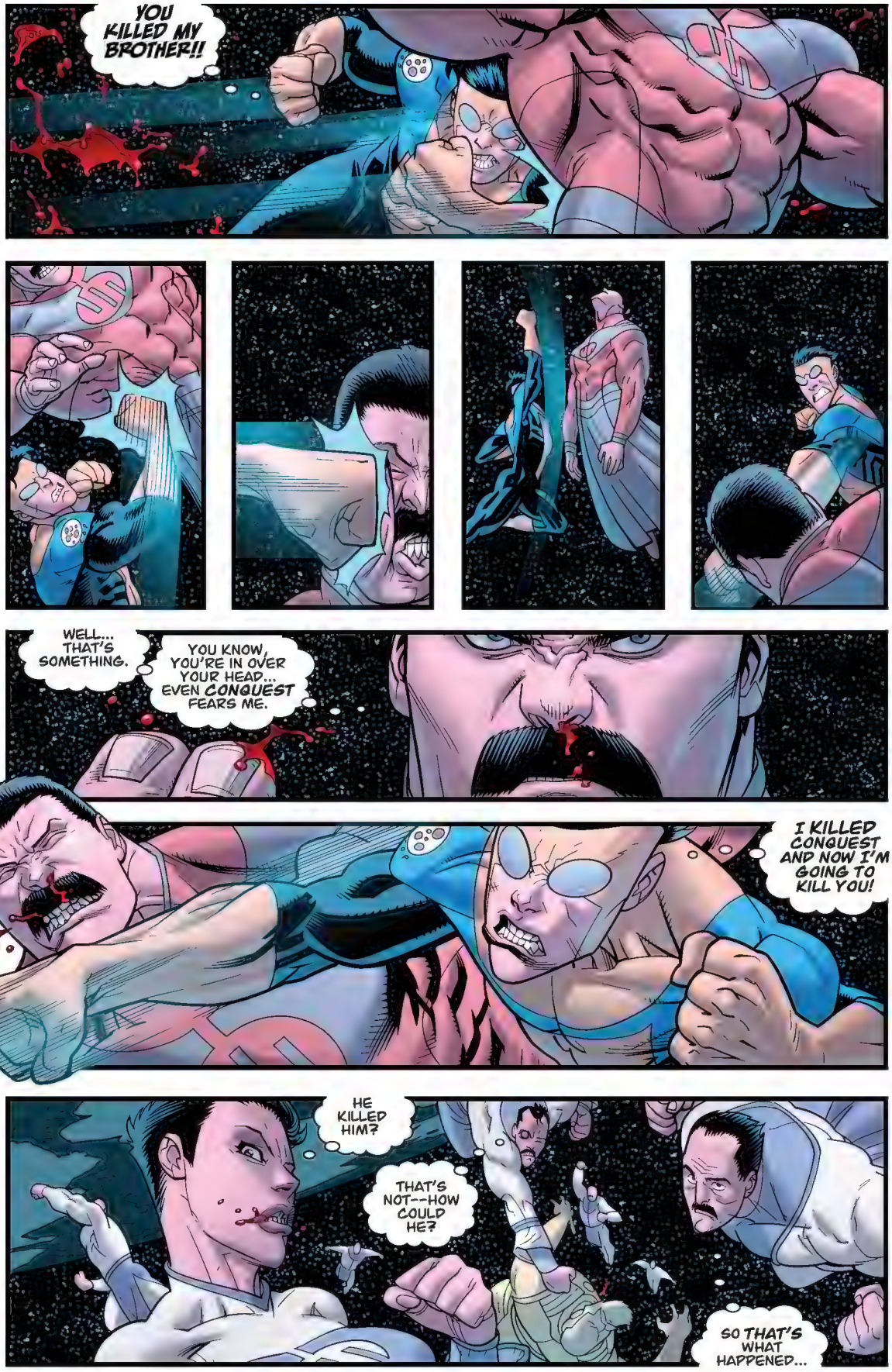

SORRY IT TOOK SO LONG. FIRING THE RESTRAINTS AROUND THEIR NECKS TOOK MORE TIME THAN WE ANTICIPATED.
BUT I SEE I'M JUST IN TIME!


BY THE THRONE OF ARGALL--!
THEY'RE TOO STRONG! DON'T TRY TO FIGHT THEM! AVOID THEM--RUN--LET THE VASTNESS OF SPACE BE THEIR DEMISE!
IT'S NOT GOING TO WORK, TRAITOR!
YOU GAVE THEM OUR EVERY WEAKNESS--SERVED US UP TO THEM ON A PLATTER--AND IT'S STILL NOT GOING TO WORK!
WE'LL SEE.
THESE TOXIN-LACED PROJECTILES ARE WORKING WONDERS--LOOK AT THESE GUYS GOING DOWN!
THIS IS GOING TO BE--!
DIE!
TECH JACKET--NO!
DON'T WORRY, ZACK! I'M--
WHOA!
WHAT IS...
OH...

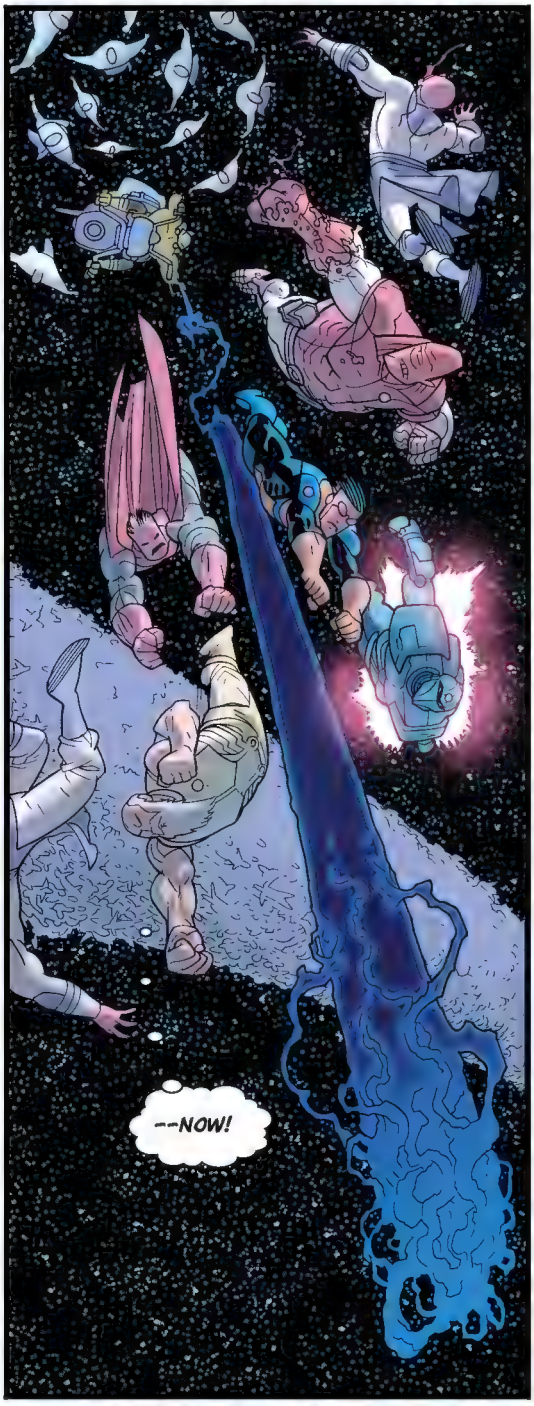
YOU'LL PAY FOR YOUR--
LOOK OUT!
SOME OF THESE GUYS ARE DEFINITELY TOUGHER THAN OTHERS!
OLIVER--BE CAREFUL-- THEY--
WHAT IS THIS BOY DOING HERE--AND A HALF-BREED, NO LESS? WE DON'T ALLOW YOUR KIND IN OUR RANKS!
INFERIOR SOLDIERS WILL NOT BE TOLER--
YOUR BALLS ARE INFERIOR, JERK FACE!
YOU DARE--?!
THEIR NUMBERS PALE IN COMPARISON TO OURS. THEIR STRENGTH IS A FAÇADE, DO NOT BELIEVE IT.
FOR THE GLORY OF THE EMPIRE, THEY WILL FALL.
DO NOT QUESTION THIS.

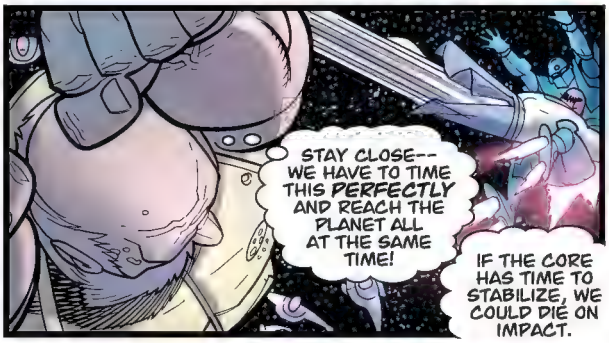
OH, CAN IT, MORON.
WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?
NO!
SOMEBODY STOP HIM, INVINCIBLE DOESN'T--
PLEASE.
HEY, DICK HEAD--A BLACK HOLE CALLED-- IT WANTS ITS SUCK BACK!
YOU ARE A FUNNY ONE, I GATHER.
ALWAYS CRACKING JOKES. VERY GOOD. I ENJOY A GOOD JOKE, MYSELF.
STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE...

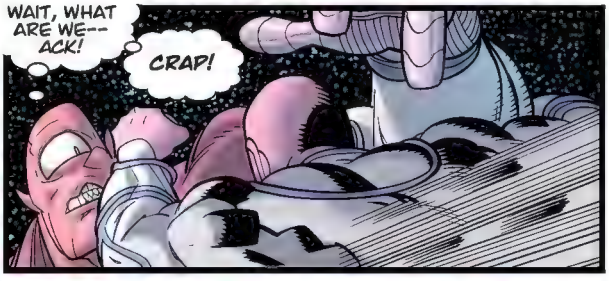

OLIVER!
GET BACK HERE!
SEEMED LIKE SUCH A NICE BOY...
MY BROTHER...

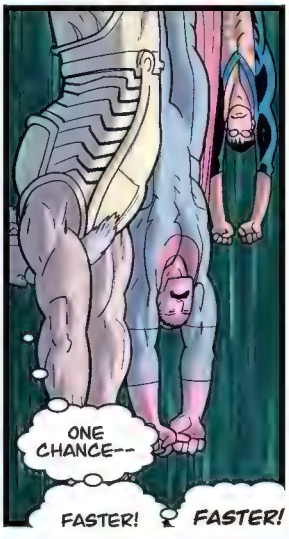

YOU KILLED MY BROTHER!!
WELL... THAT'S SOMETHING.
YOU KNOW, YOU'RE IN OVER YOUR HEAD... EVEN CONQUEST FEARS ME.
I KILLED CONQUEST AND NOW I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!
HE KILLED HIM?
THAT'S NOT--HOW COULD HE?
SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED...

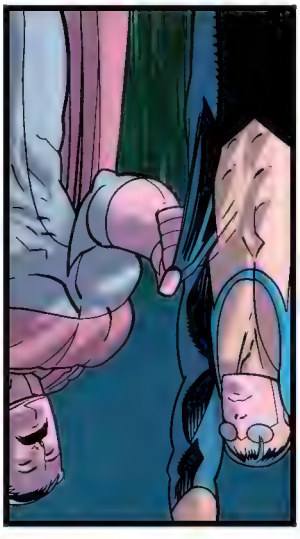
WHAT HE SAYS IS TRUE--MY SON KILLED CONQUEST!
STILL SO CONFIDENT IN YOUR VICTORY?
NOW, WHILE THEY'RE DISTRACTED--WE HAVE TO MAKE A MOVE--SOMETHING THEY WON'T EXPECT.
SPACE RACER--TO ME!
YES!
YES!!
WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?
BEATS ME.
ALL OF YOU--WITH ME--NOW!
WE'LL ONLY GET ONE SHOT AT THIS!
SPACE RACER--DEAD CENTER, FIRE YOUR GUN--

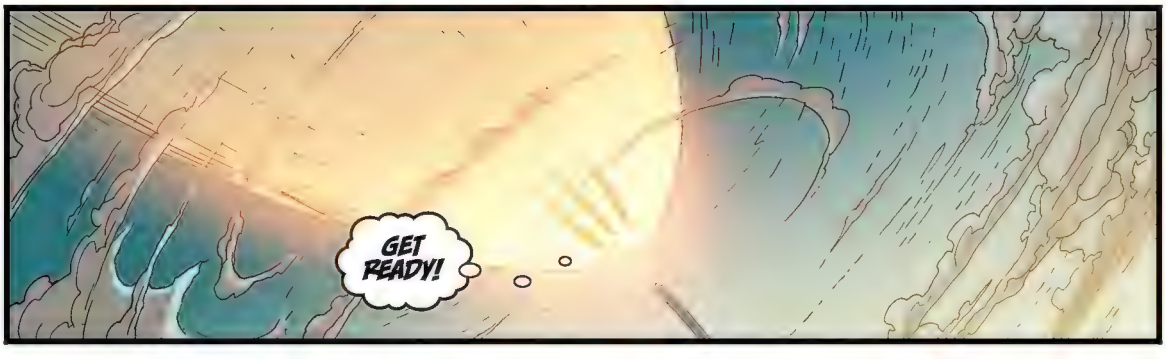

--NOW!

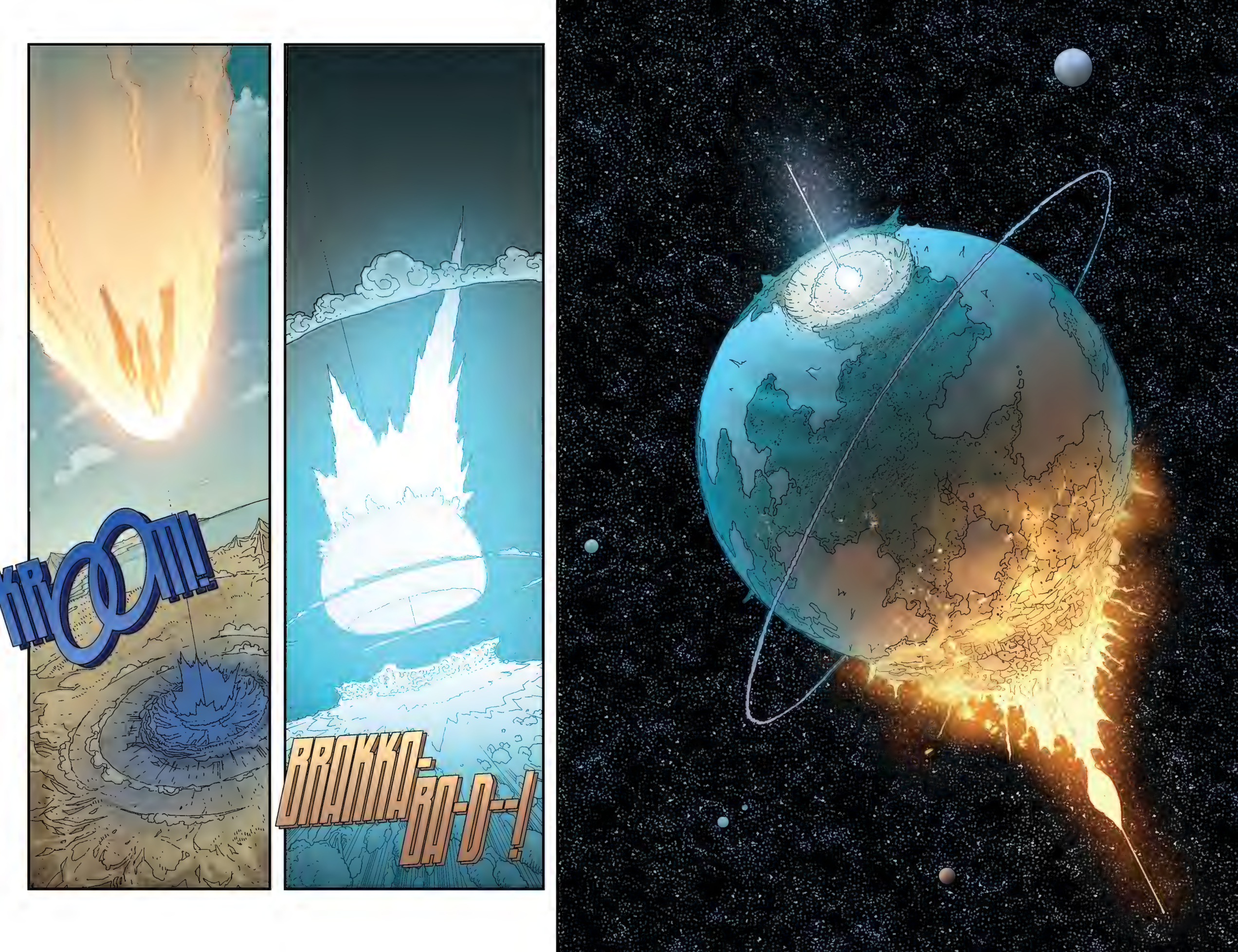

STAY CLOSE-- WE HAVE TO TIME THIS PERFECTLY AND REACH THE PLANET ALL AT THE SAME TIME!
IF THE CORE HAS TIME TO STABILIZE, WE COULD DIE ON IMPACT.


WAIT, WHAT ARE WE-- ACK!
CRAP!

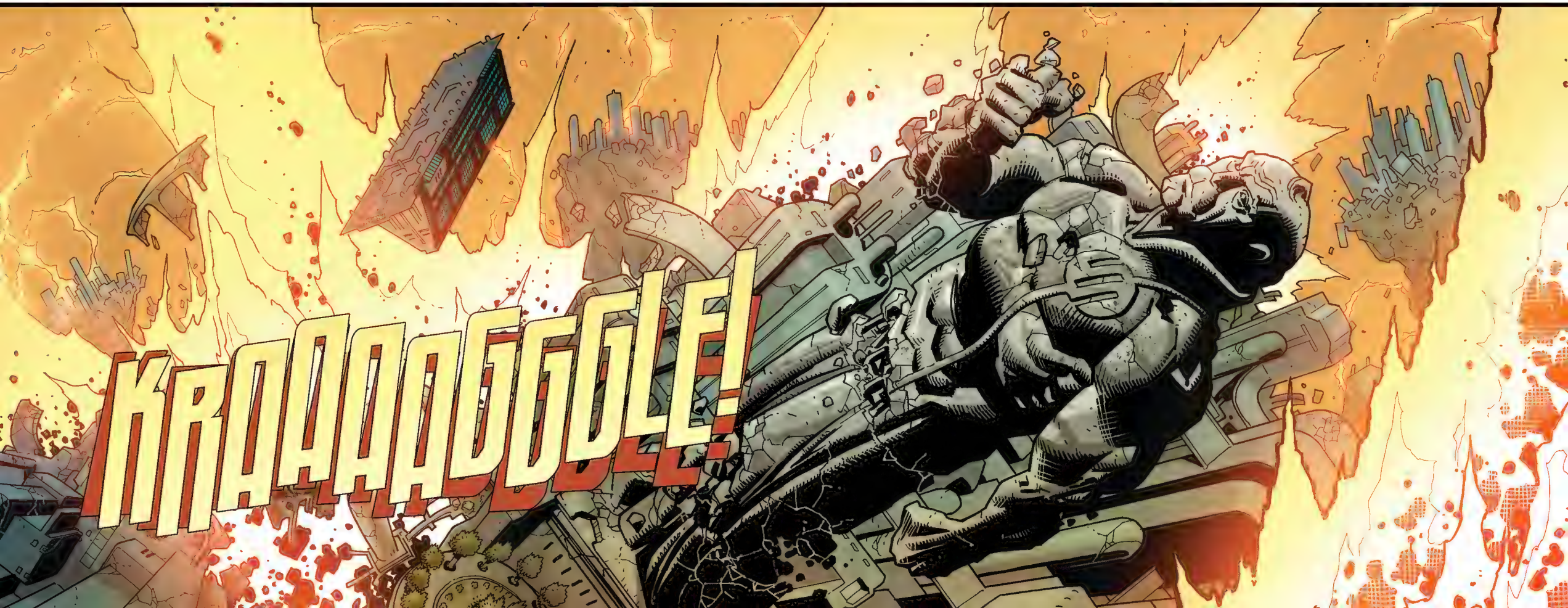

ONE CHANCE--
FASTER!
FASTER!




GET READY!


KROOM!
BRAKKA-BA-O--!

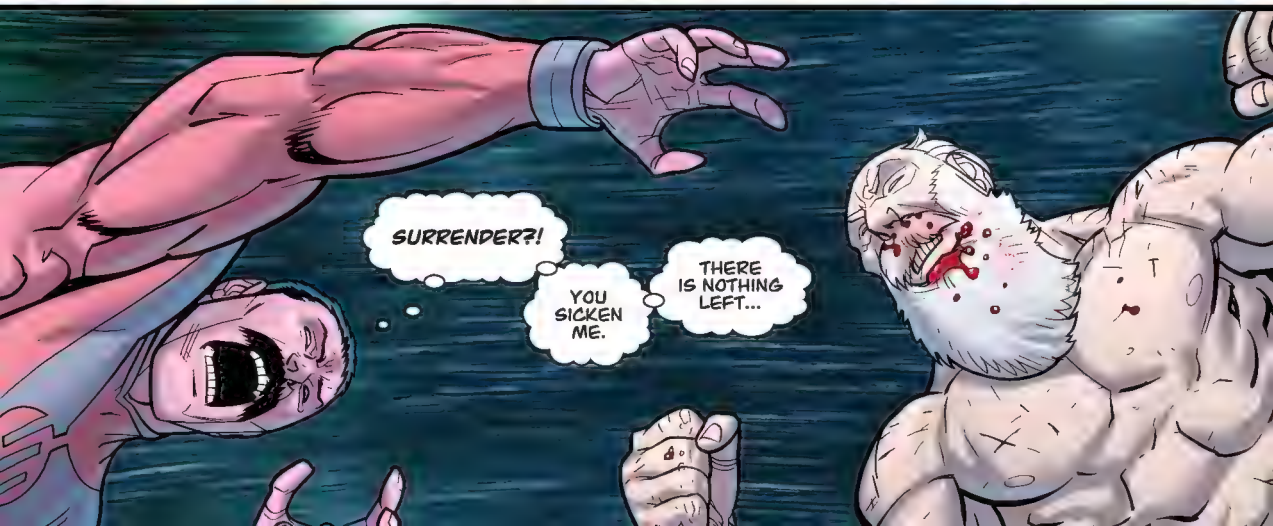
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!
BOOM!


KRAGGGGGLE!

HEAR ME, VILTRUMITES.
IT IS OVER. YOUR PLANET IS GONE, YOU HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO RUN. THE UNIVERSE IS UNITED AGAINST YOU.
THERE IS NOTHING LEFT BUT SURRENDER.
YOU....

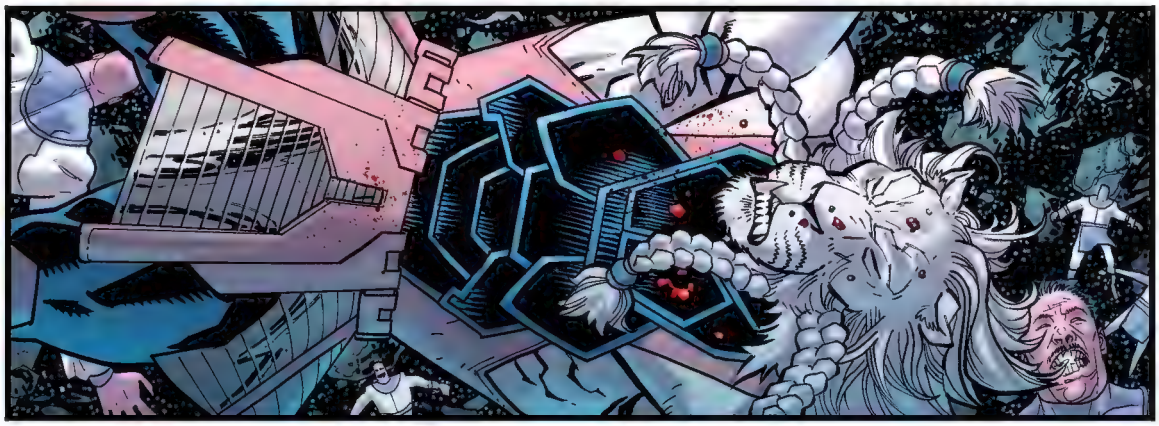
YOU BROUGHT THIS UPON US ALL-- IT IS *YOU* WHO SET THIS IN MOTION-- CARRIED IT OUT-- THAEDUS OF VILTRUM... ***BETRAYER.***
YOU HAVE TAKEN IT ALL FROM US. OUR HERITAGE, OUR HOME... OUR HISTORY... ***DESTROYED.***
THE VILTRUM EMPIRE WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS!

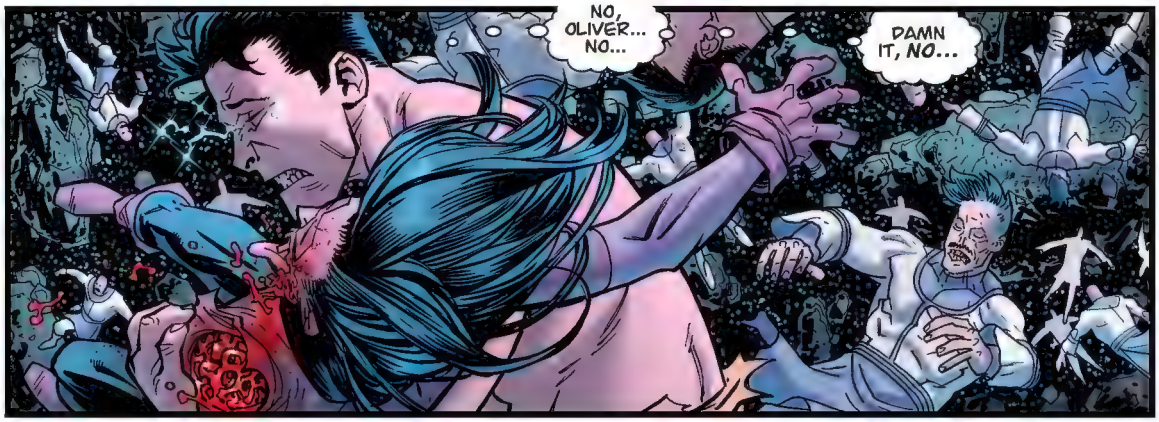
YOU WILL DO WHAT YOU WILL AND I AM PREPARED FOR YOUR WRATH. BUT KNOW THIS, THRAGG, WHATEVER HAPPENS HERE...
...YOU ***HAVE*** NO EMPIRE.
SURRENDER YOUR--

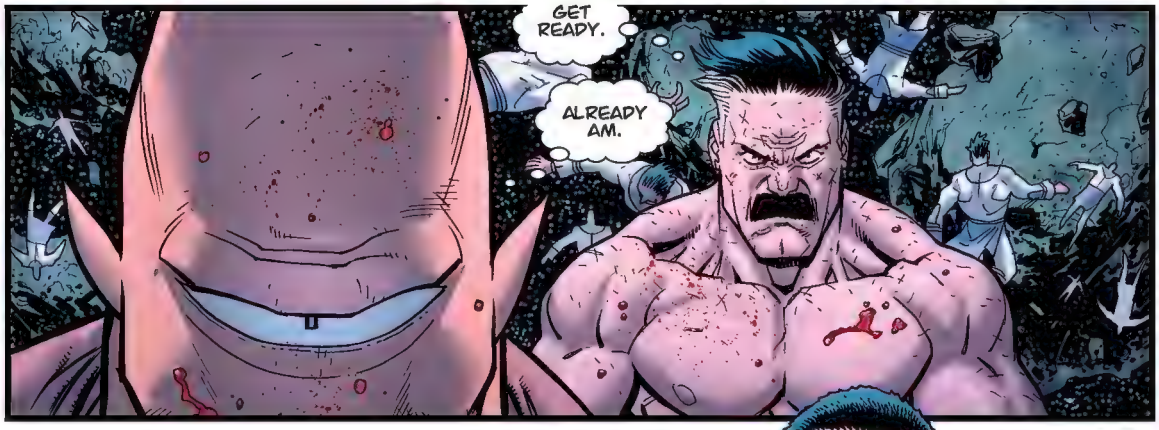

SURRENDER?!
YOU SICKEN ME.
THERE IS NOTHING LEFT...

...BUT REVENGE!

AT LONG LAST, LORD ARGALL, YOU HAVE BEEN AVENGED.
YOU WILL NOT BE MISSED.




NO, OLIVER... NO...
DAMN IT, NO...

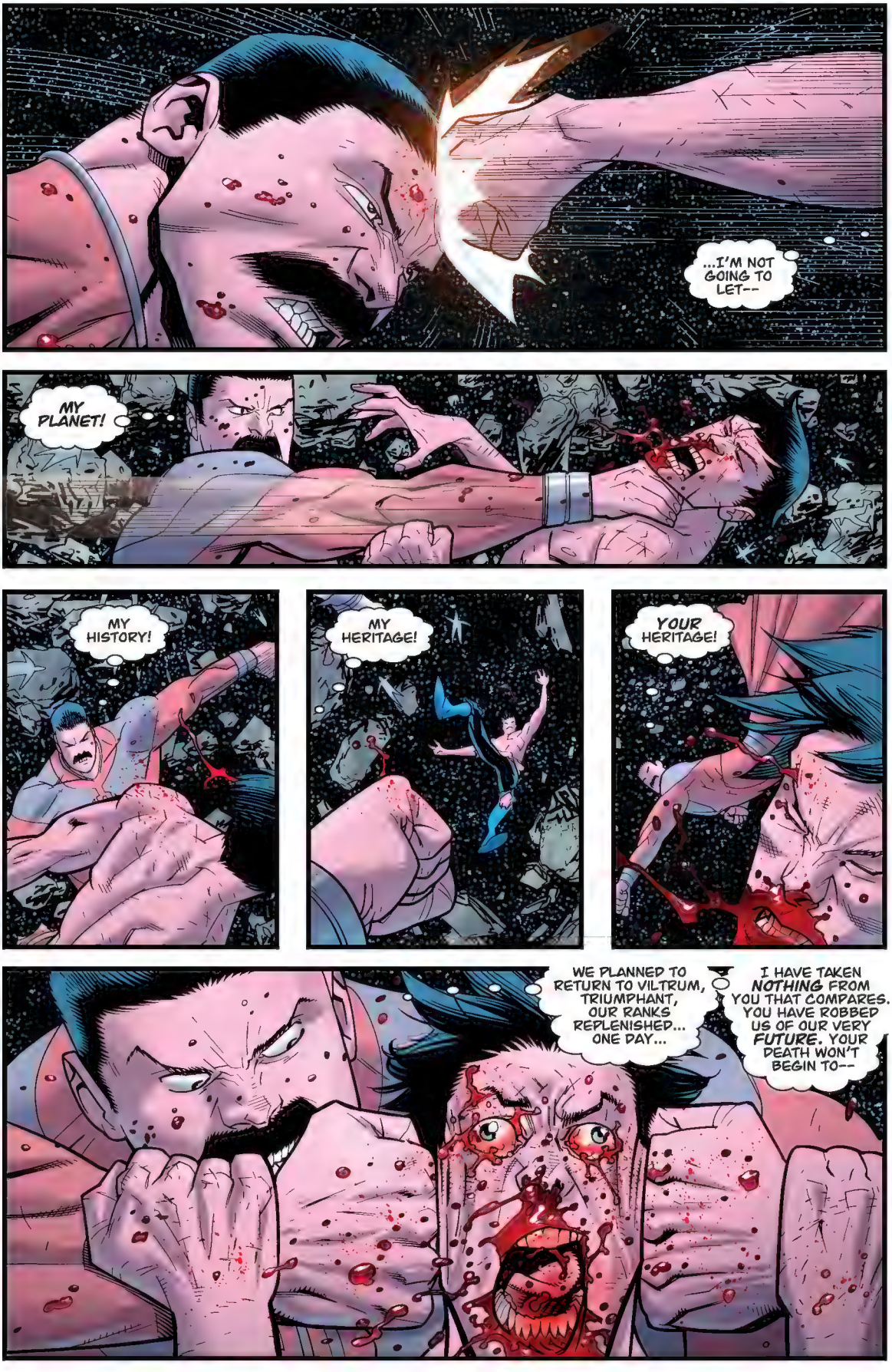

GET READY.
ALREADY AM.

GRIEVE WHILE YOU CAN, BECAUSE I ASSURE YOU...

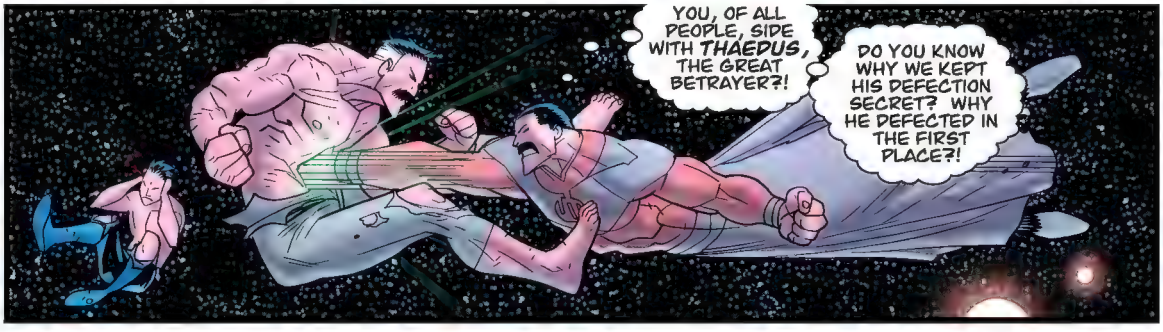
YOU ARE ALL NEXT.

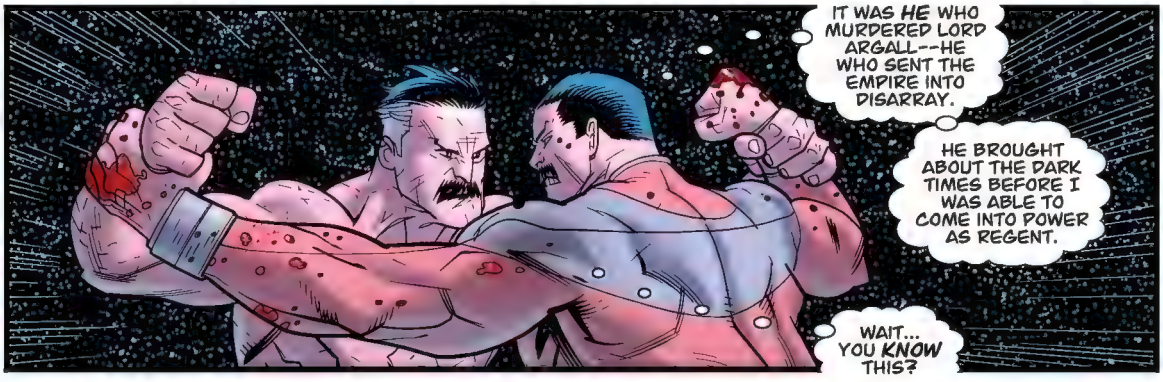
CHAPTER SIX
RYAN

I'M STARTING WITH YOU!
YOU KILLED MY BROTHER...


...I'M NOT GOING TO LET--
MY PLANET!
MY HISTORY!
MY HERITAGE!
YOUR HERITAGE!
WE PLANNED TO RETURN TO VILTRUM, TRIUMPHANT, OUR RANKS REPLENISHED... ONE DAY...
I HAVE TAKEN NOTHING FROM YOU THAT COMPARES. YOU HAVE ROBBED US OF OUR VERY FUTURE. YOUR DEATH WON'T BEGIN TO--

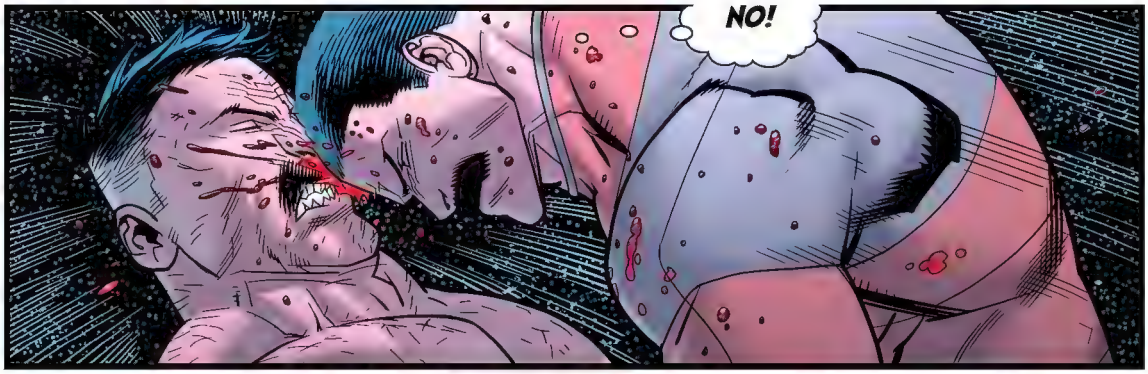
IT'S OVER, THRAGG! GIVE IT UP--YOU'VE LOST, CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?
AND YOU!

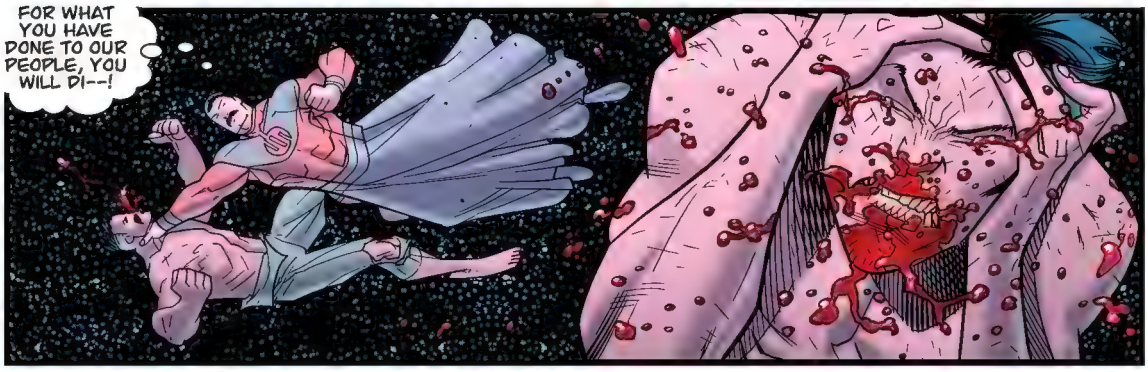

YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, SIDE WITH THAEDUS, THE GREAT BETRAYER?!
DO YOU KNOW WHY WE KEPT HIS DEFECTION SECRET? WHY HE DEFECTED IN THE FIRST PLACE?!

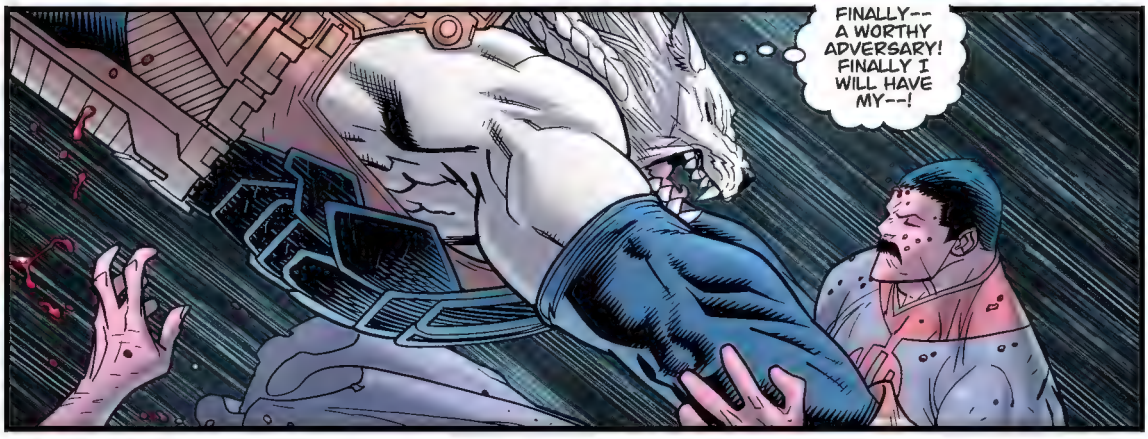

IT WAS HE WHO MURDERED LORD ARGALL--HE WHO SENT THE EMPIRE INTO DISARRAY.
HE BROUGHT ABOUT THE DARK TIMES BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO COME INTO POWER AS REGENT.
WAIT... YOU KNOW THIS?

WE ALSO BELIEVE HE WAS BEHIND THE SCOURGE VIRUS--WHICH STOLE ANY HOPE OF FINDING A TRUE HEIR TO ARGALL.
HE MUST HAVE USED HIS OWN DNA FOR THEM TO DEVELOP IT--IT'S THE ONLY WAY.

I--
I AM NOT THE MAN I ONCE WAS. I FEEL OUR PEOPLE DESERVE NOTHING LESS THAN EXTINCTION FOR WHAT WE'VE DONE...
NO MATTER HOW IT PAINS ME TO SAY SUCH A THING.

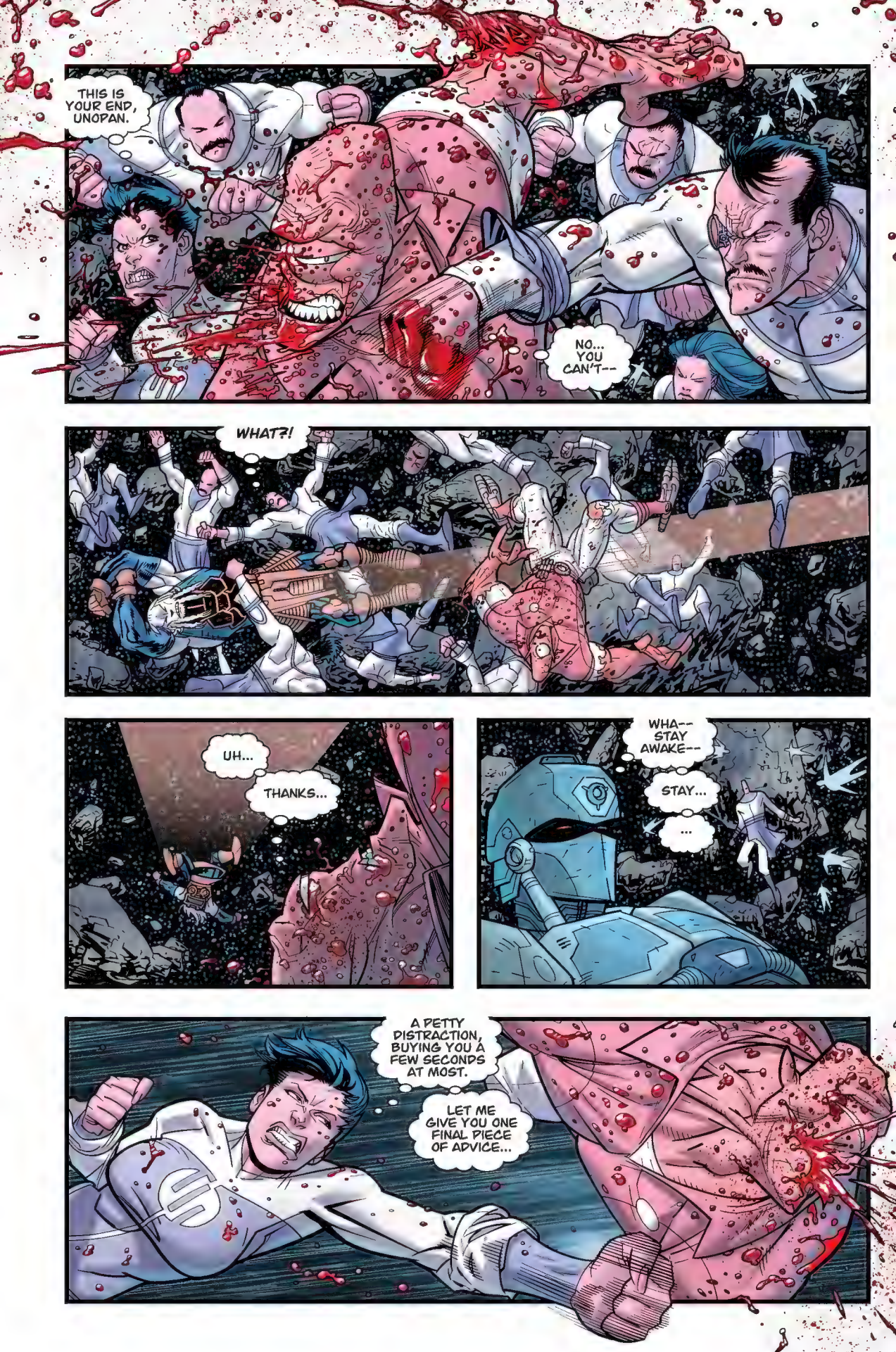

NO!

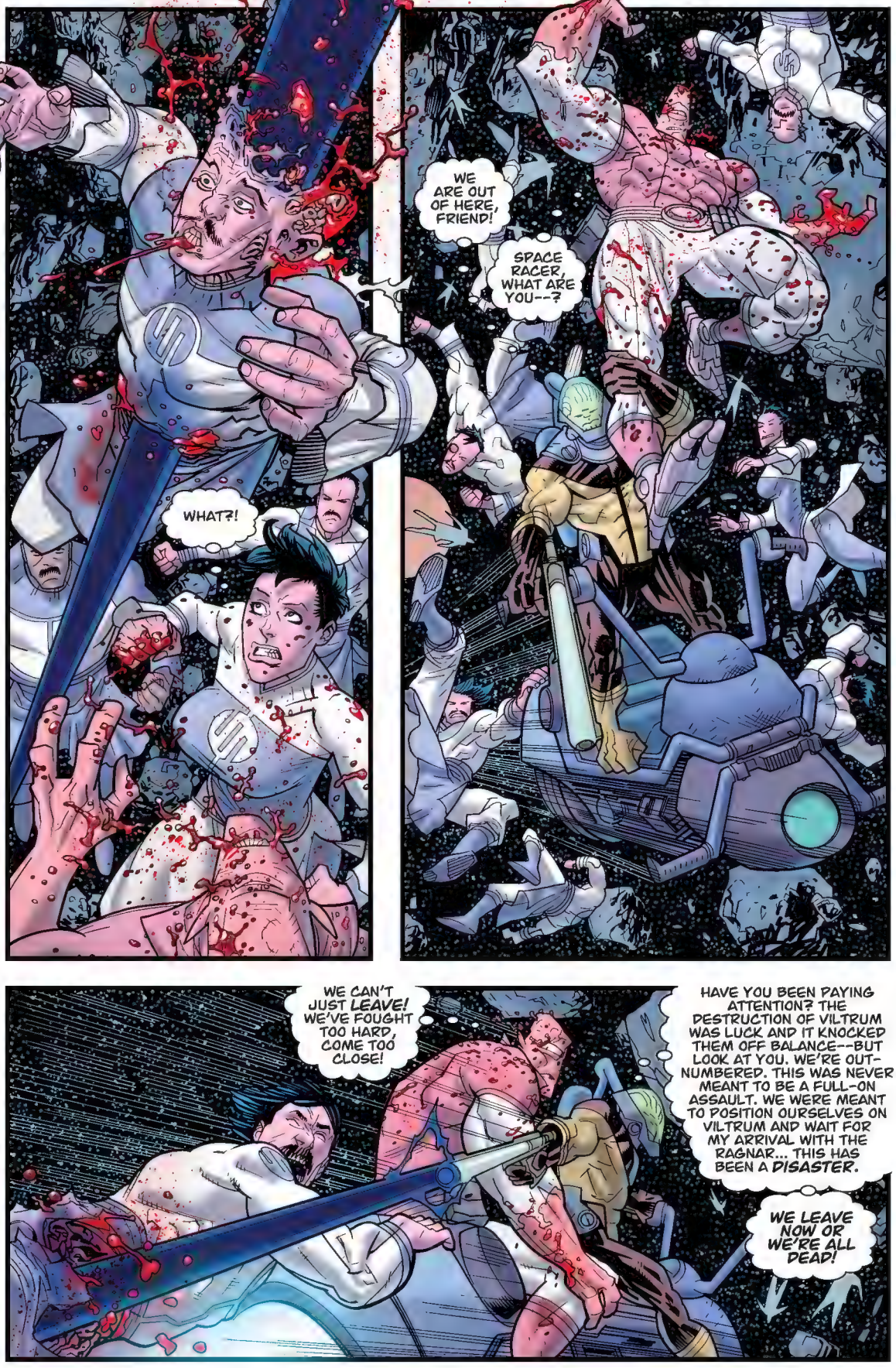

FOR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE TO OUR PEOPLE, YOU WILL DI--!

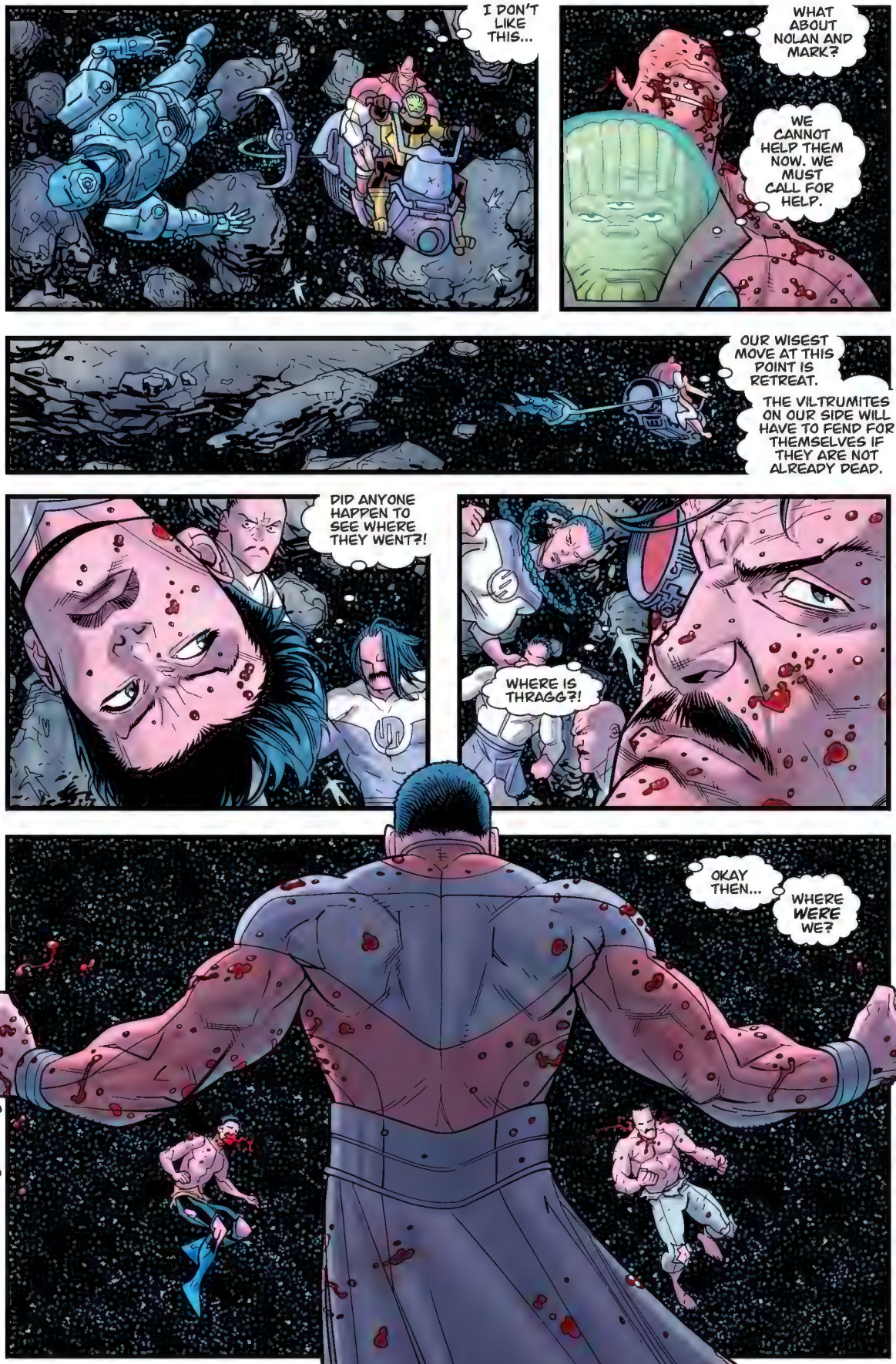

FINALLY-- A WORTHY ADVERSARY! FINALLY I WILL HAVE MY--!

IRK!

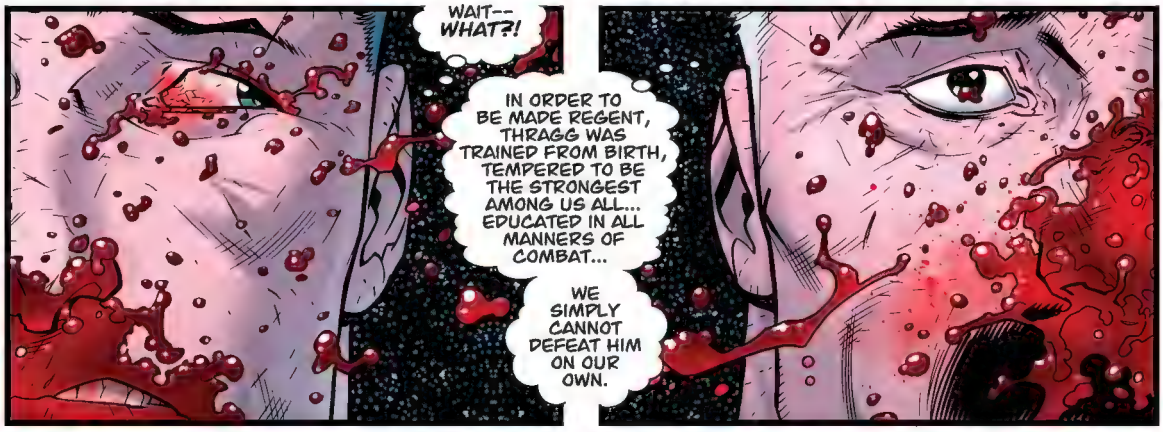
A NUISANCE AT BEST.

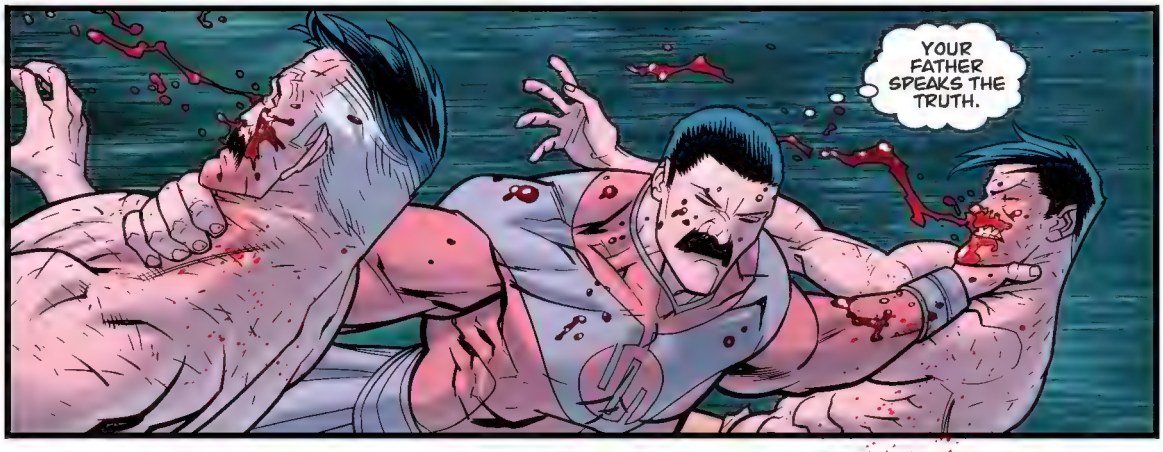

THIS IS YOUR END, UNOPAN.
NO... YOU CAN'T--
WHAT?!
UH...
THANKS...
WHA-- STAY AWAKE--
STAY...
...
A PETTY DISTRACTION, BUYING YOU A FEW SECONDS AT MOST.
LET ME GIVE YOU ONE FINAL PIECE OF ADVICE...

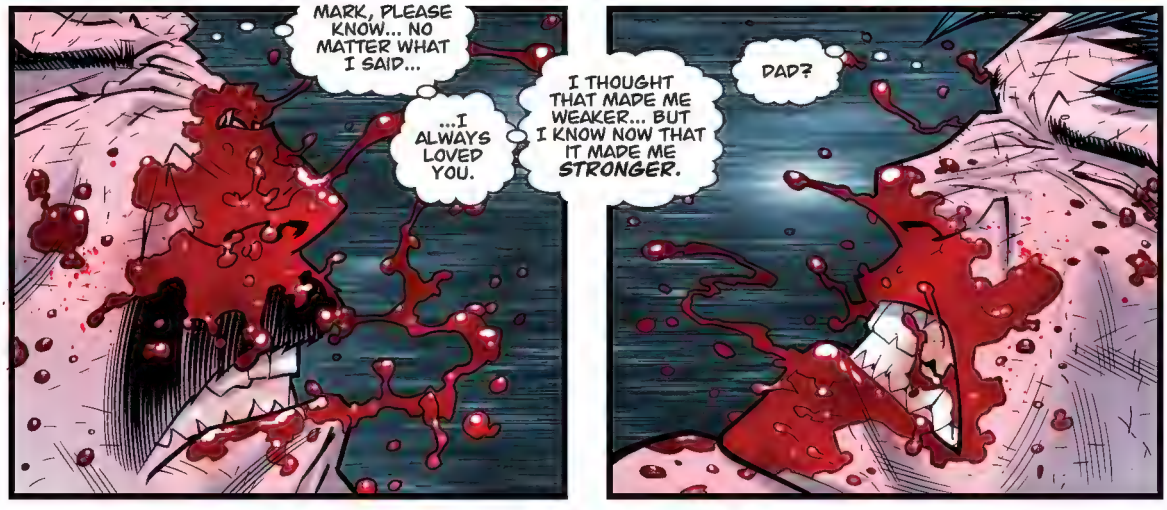

WHAT?!
WE ARE OUT OF HERE, FRIEND!
SPACE RACER, WHAT ARE YOU--?
WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE! WE'VE FOUGHT TOO HARD, COME TOO CLOSE!
HAVE YOU BEEN PAYING ATTENTION? THE DESTRUCTION OF VILTRUM WAS LUCK AND IT KNOCKED THEM OFF BALANCE--BUT LOOK AT YOU. WE'RE OUTNUMBERED. THIS WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE A FULL-ON ASSAULT. WE WERE MEANT TO POSITION OURSELVES ON VILTRUM AND WAIT FOR MY ARRIVAL WITH THE RAGNAR... THIS HAS BEEN A DISASTER.
WE LEAVE NOW OR WE'RE ALL DEAD!

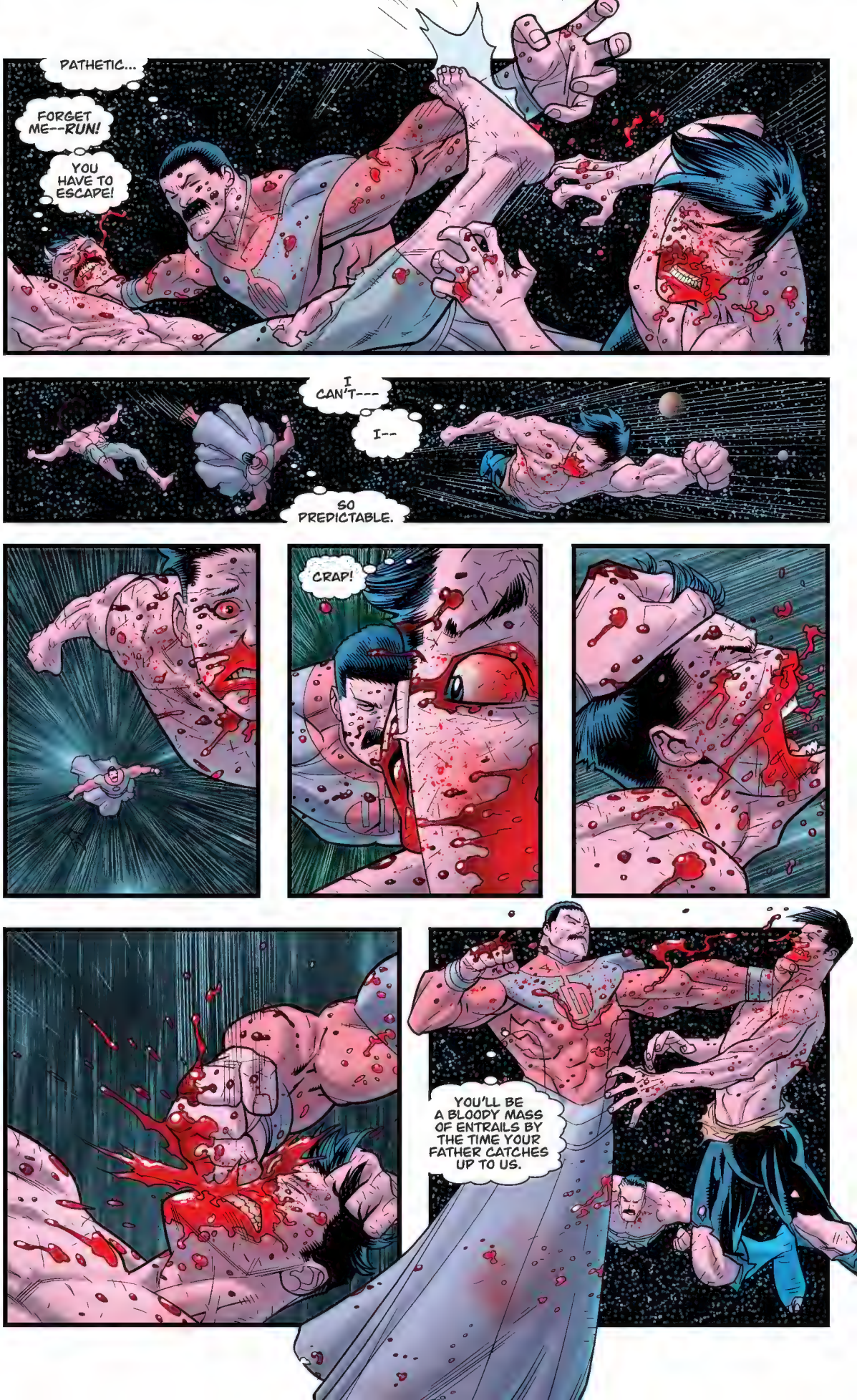

I DON'T LIKE THIS...
WHAT ABOUT NOLAN AND MARK?
WE CANNOT HELP THEM NOW. WE MUST CALL FOR HELP.
OUR WISEST MOVE AT THIS POINT IS RETREAT.
THE VILTRUMITES ON OUR SIDE WILL HAVE TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES IF THEY ARE NOT ALREADY DEAD.
DID ANYONE HAPPEN TO SEE WHERE THEY WENT?!
WHERE IS THRAGG?!
OKAY THEN...
WHERE WERE WE?

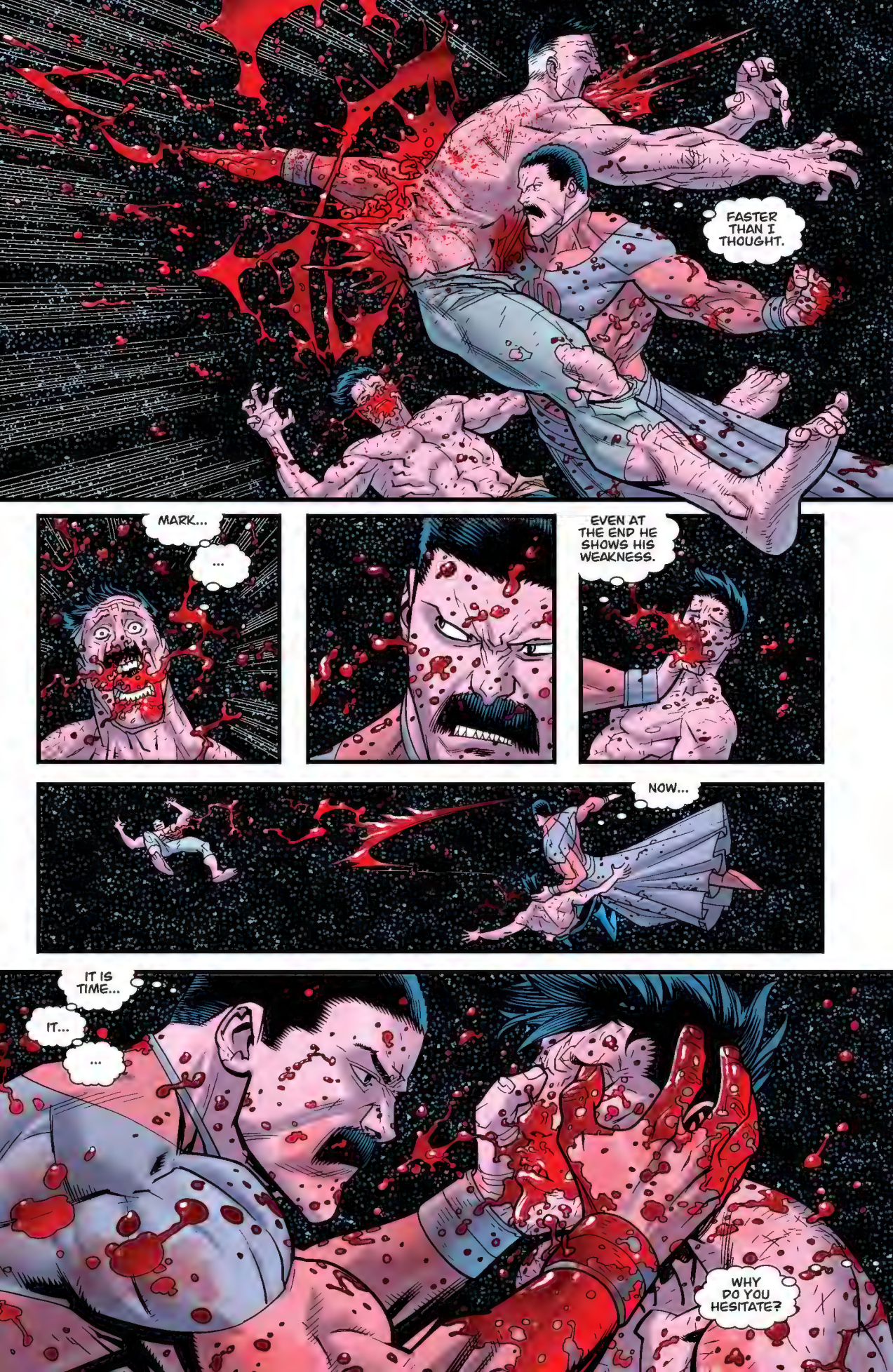
HOW DO WE BEAT THIS GUY?
WE CAN'T.


WAIT-- WHAT?!
IN ORDER TO BE MADE REGENT, THRAGG WAS TRAINED FROM BIRTH, TEMPERED TO BE THE STRONGEST AMONG US ALL... EDUCATED IN ALL MANNERS OF COMBAT...
WE SIMPLY CANNOT DEFEAT HIM ON OUR OWN.

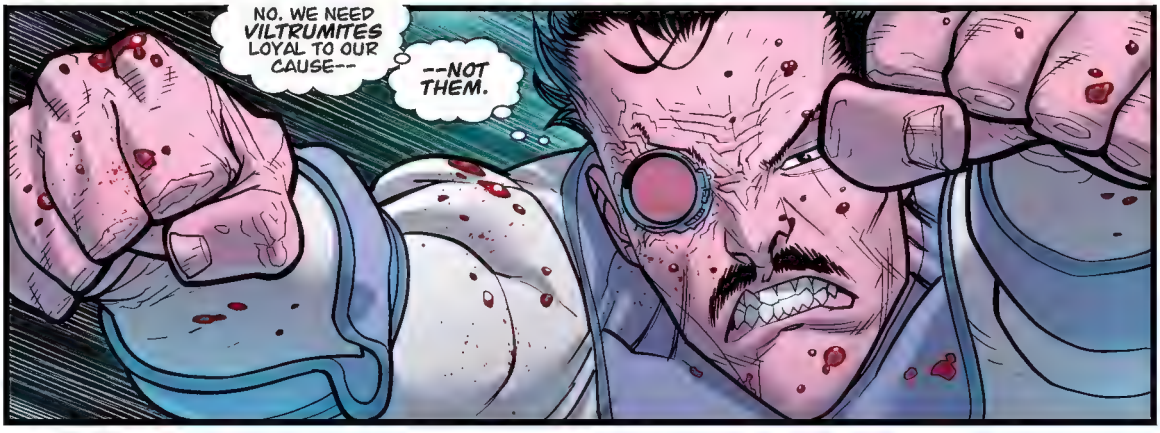

YOUR FATHER SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

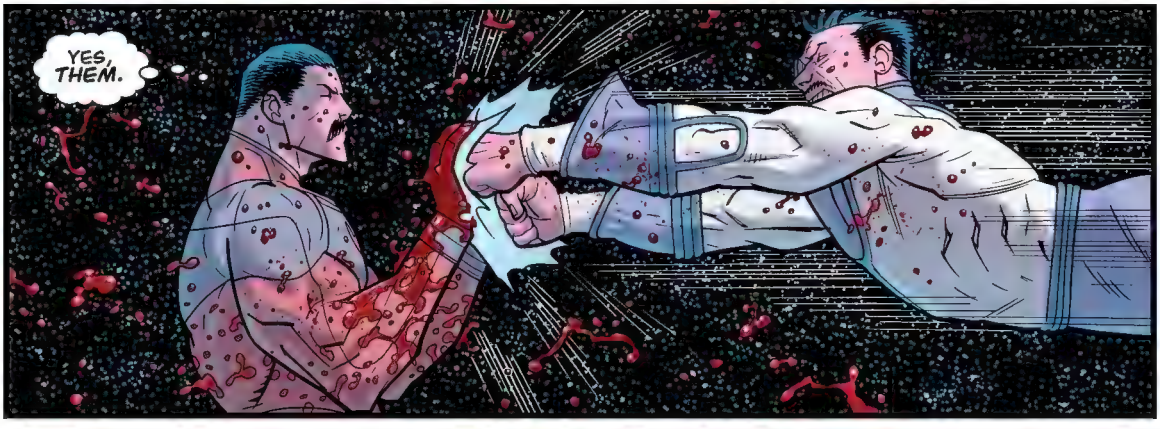

MARK, PLEASE KNOW... NO MATTER WHAT I SAID...
...I ALWAYS LOVED YOU.
I THOUGHT THAT MADE ME WEAKER... BUT I KNOW NOW THAT IT MADE ME STRONGER.
DAD?

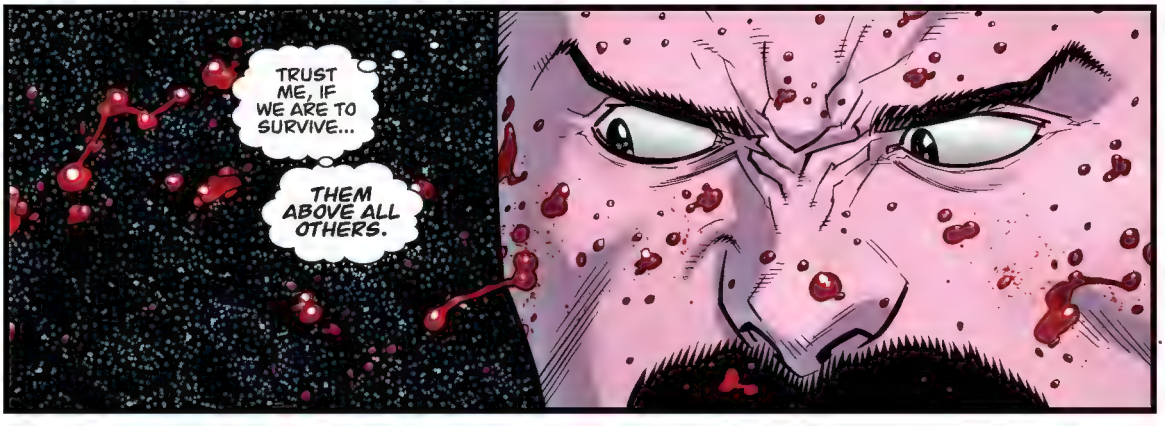

PATHETIC...
FORGET ME--RUN!
YOU HAVE TO ESCAPE!
I CAN'T---
I--
SO PREDICTABLE.
CRAP!
YOU'LL BE A BLOODY MASS OF ENTRAILS BY THE TIME YOUR FATHER CATCHES UP TO US.

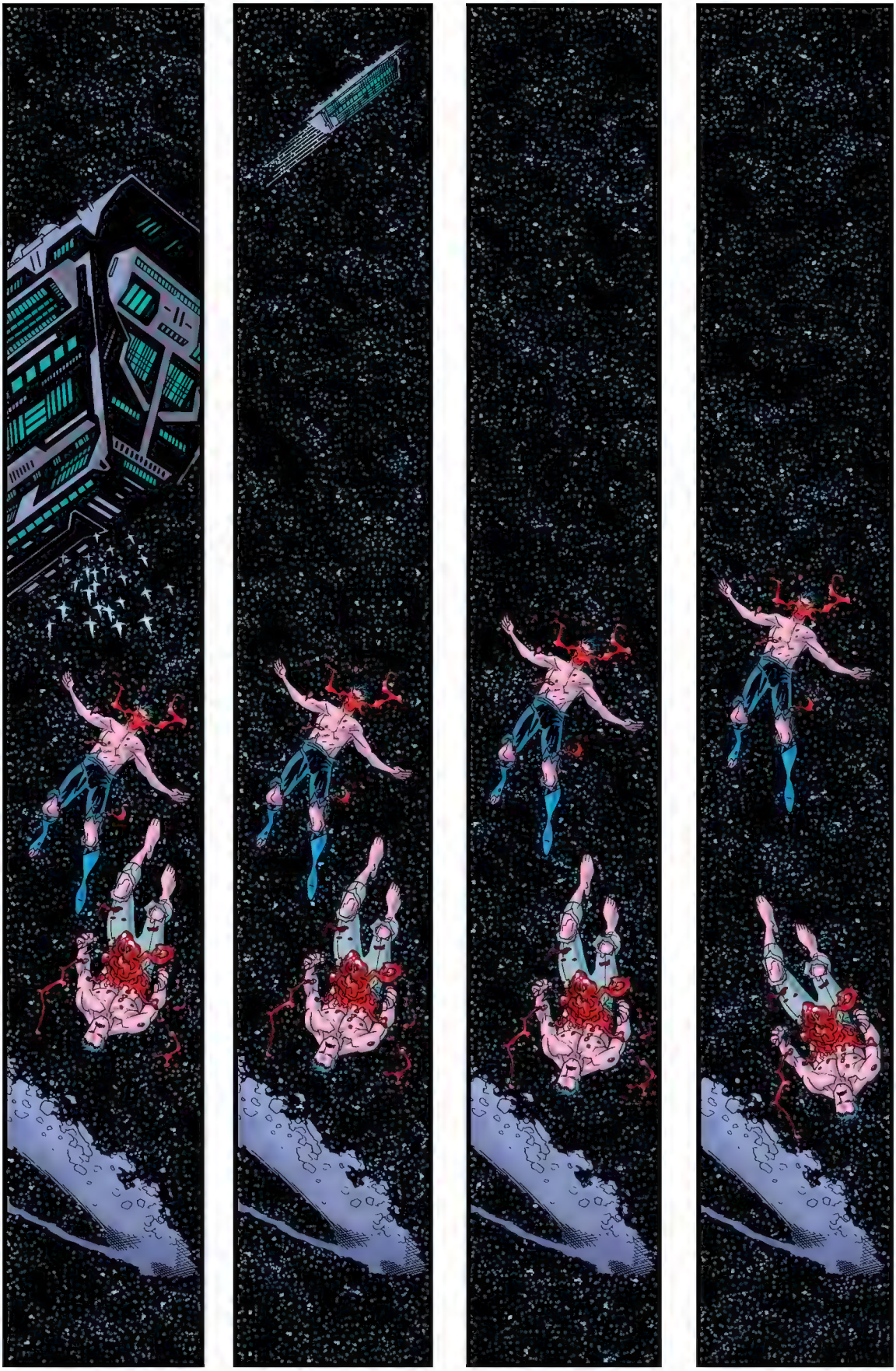

FASTER THAN I THOUGHT.
MARK...
...
EVEN AT THE END HE SHOWS HIS WEAKNESS.
NOW...
IT IS TIME...
IT...
...
WHY DO YOU HESITATE?

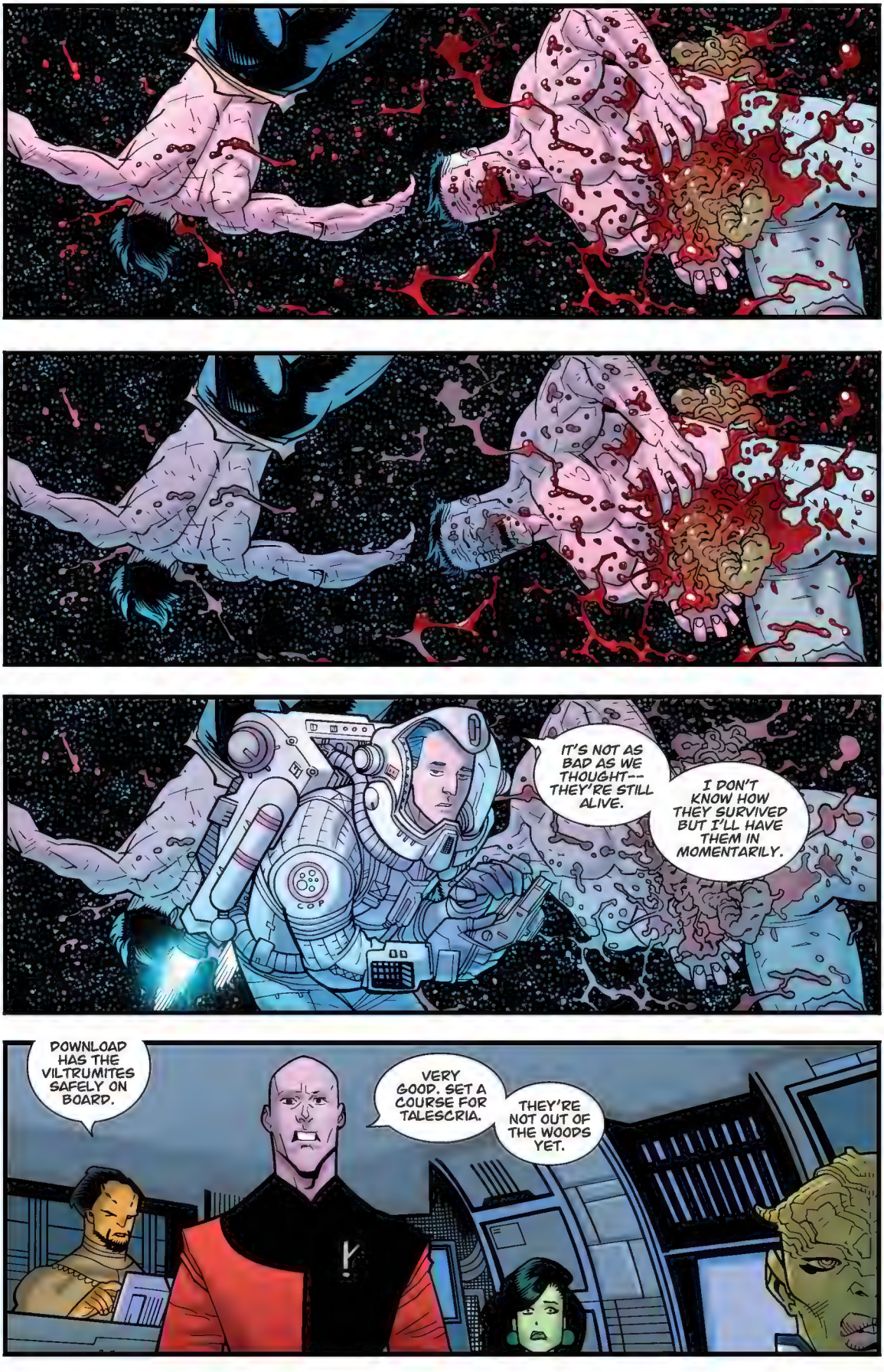
WE NEED THEM... WE NEED ALL VILTRUMITES.
THEY WILL BE SPARED.
CALL THE SHIP.
FORGIVE ME, REGENT... BUT NO.


NO. WE NEED VILTRUMITES LOYAL TO OUR CAUSE--
--NOT THEM.

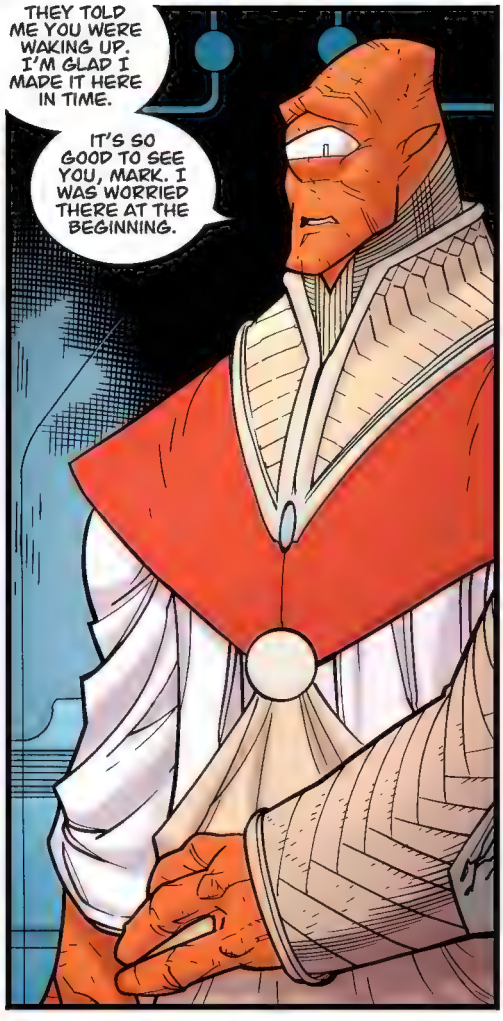

YES, THEM.

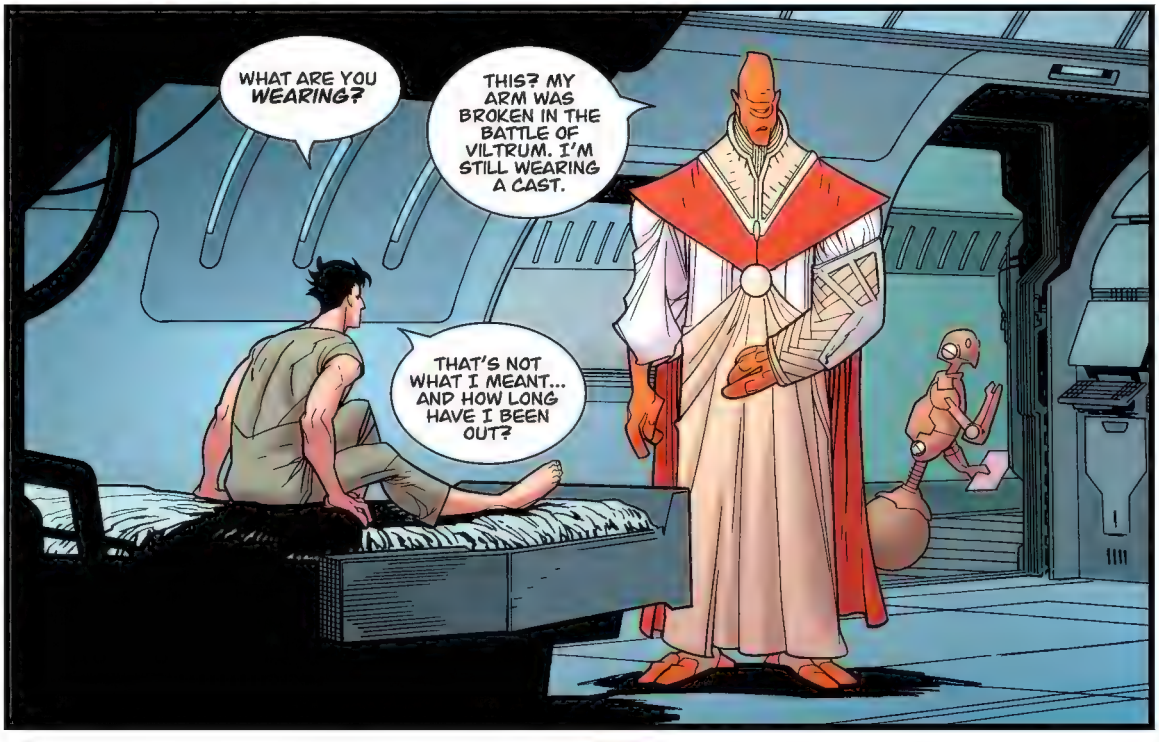

TRUST ME, IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE...
THEM ABOVE ALL OTHERS.



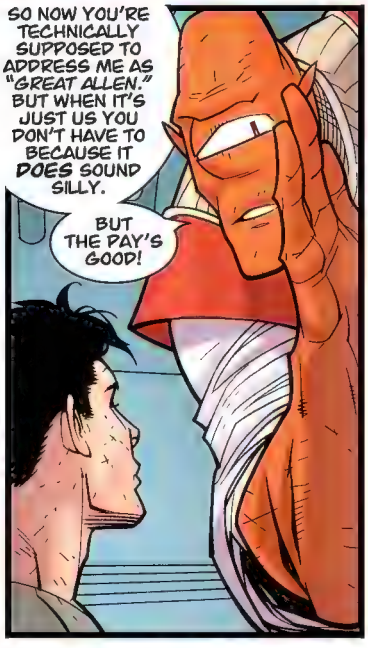

IT'S NOT AS BAD AS WE THOUGHT-- THEY'RE STILL ALIVE.
I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY SURVIVED BUT I'LL HAVE THEM IN MOMENTARILY.
DOWNLOAD HAS THE VILTRUMITES SAFELY ON BOARD.
VERY GOOD. SET A COURSE FOR TALESCRIA.
THEY'RE NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET.

WHA--
--HUH?


THEY TOLD ME YOU WERE WAKING UP. I'M GLAD I MADE IT HERE IN TIME.
IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU, MARK. I WAS WORRIED THERE AT THE BEGINNING.

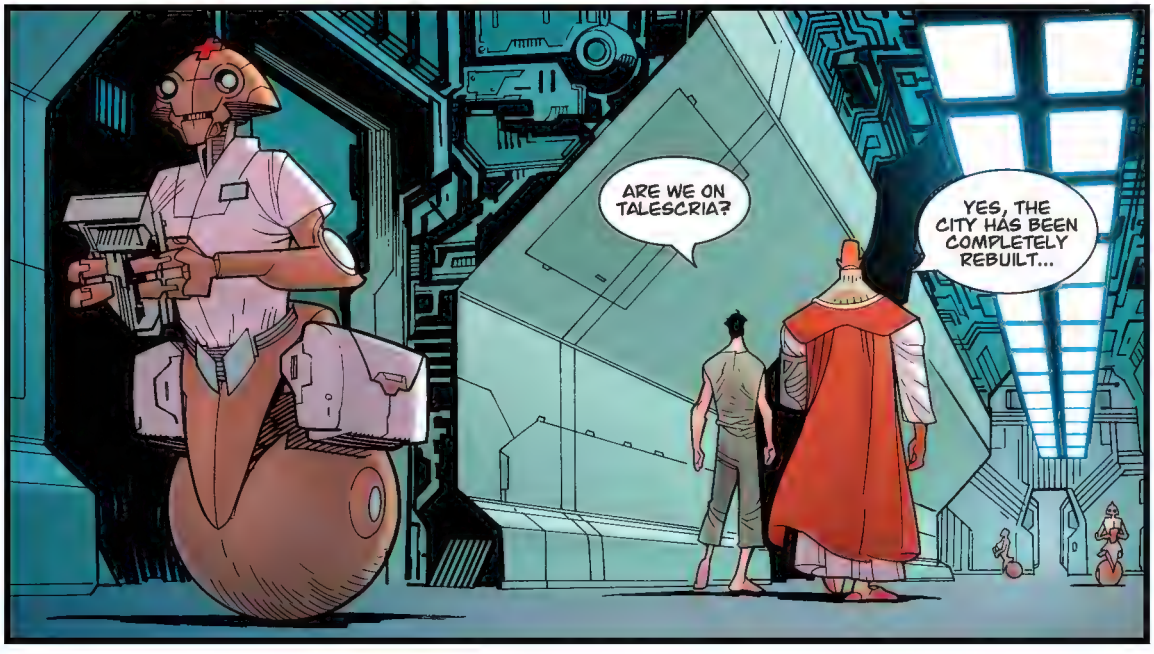

WHAT ARE YOU *WEARING?*
THIS? MY ARM WAS BROKEN IN THE BATTLE OF VILTRUM. I'M STILL WEARING A CAST.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT... AND HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN OUT?

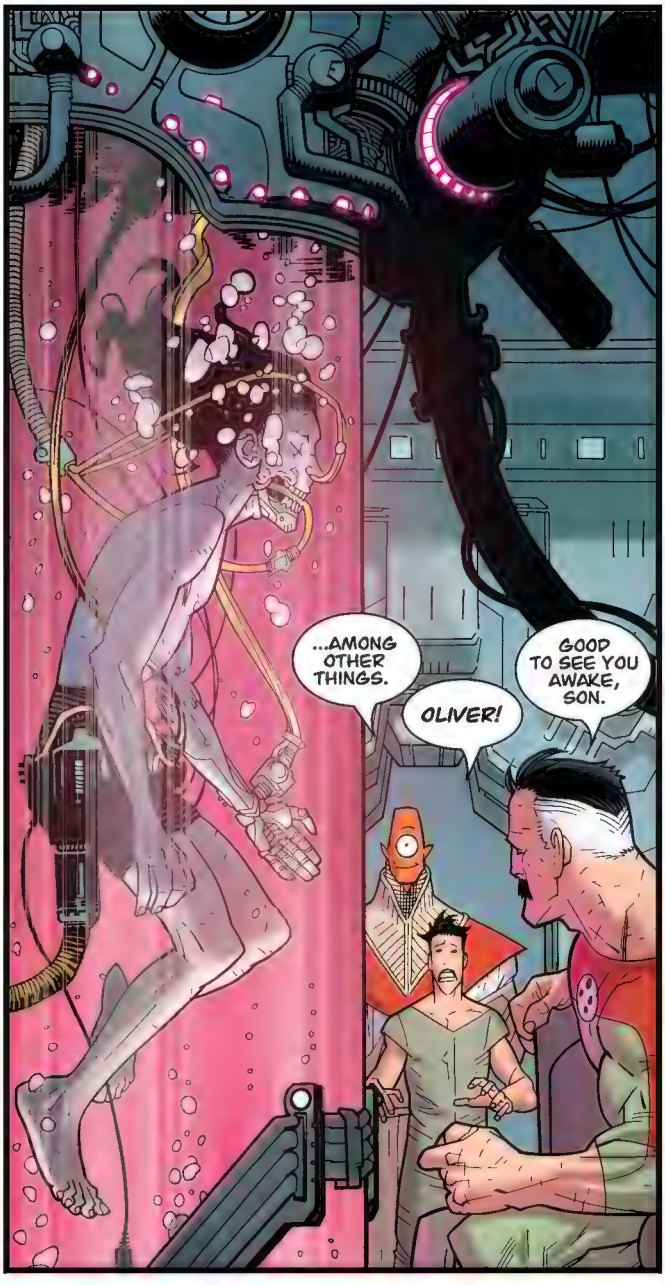
TWO WEEKS, YOU WERE PRETTY MESSED UP. AS FOR THE CLOTHES... I'VE BEEN BUMPED UP TO THE TOP POSITION. I'M THE BOSS.
WITH THAEDUS GONE, THE COALITION OF PLANETS WAS IN DISARRAY, AND THEY FEARED THIS WAR WAS FAR FROM OVER.
I WAS HASTILY CHRISTENED TOP DOG OF THE COALITION.

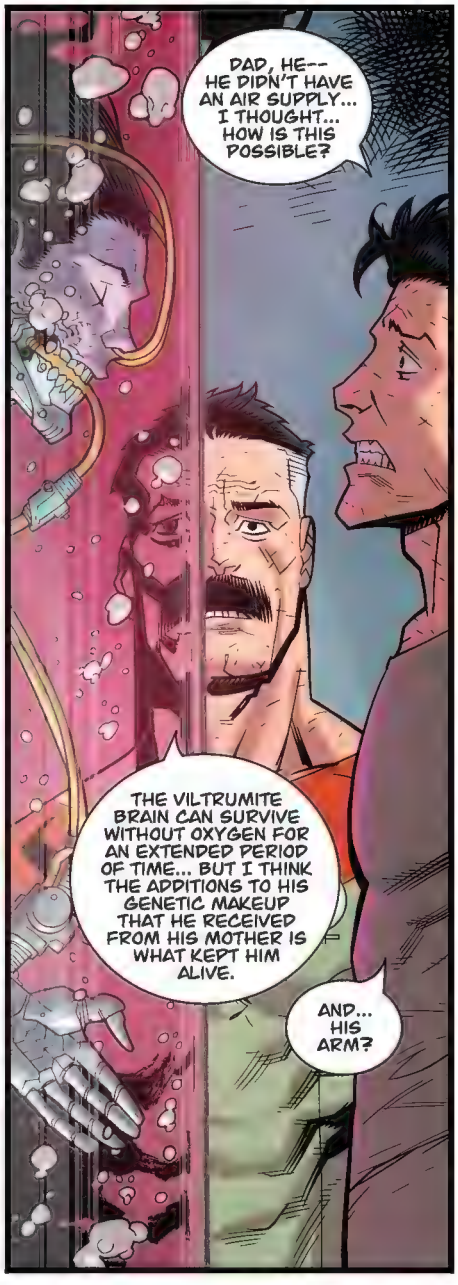

SO NOW YOU'RE TECHNICALLY SUPPOSED TO ADDRESS ME AS "GREAT ALLEN." BUT WHEN IT'S JUST US YOU DON'T HAVE TO BECAUSE IT DOES SOUND SILLY.
BUT THE PAY'S GOOD!

WELL, UH...
CONGRATS.
IS MY FATHER AROUND? I ASSUME HE WOKE UP BEFORE I DID.

HE DID... BY A FEW DAYS.
THIS WAY.


ARE WE ON TALESCRIA?
YES, THE CITY HAS BEEN COMPLETELY REBUILT...


GOOD TO SEE YOU AWAKE, SON.
OLIVER!
...AMONG OTHER THINGS.


DAD, HE-- HE DIDN'T HAVE AN AIR SUPPLY... I THOUGHT... HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?
THE VILTRUMITE BRAIN CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT OXYGEN FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME... BUT I THINK THE ADDITIONS TO HIS GENETIC MAKEUP THAT HE RECEIVED FROM HIS MOTHER IS WHAT KEPT HIM ALIVE.
AND... HIS ARM?

THE SOLUTION HE'S SUSPENDED IN IS ENHANCING HIS NATURAL REGENERATIVE ABILITIES.
HIS OWN SKIN IS BEING GROWN OVER PROSTHETIC REPLACEMENTS FOR HIS ARM AND LOWER JAW.
HIS BRAIN SCANS ARE REMARKABLE. IF HIS HEALING KEEPS UP AT THIS PACE, HE SHOULD BE OUT OF THE TUBE IN ANOTHER WEEK, READY TO BEGIN HIS PHYSICAL REHABILITATION.
HE WON'T BE BACK UP TO FULL POWER ANY TIME SOON... BUT HE'S ALIVE.
HE'S ALIVE.

I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT, HEH... GREAT ALLEN... BUT THE STATUS REPORT FROM THE OUTER TERRITORIES HAS COME IN.
AND?
NOTHING. LIKE ALWAYS.
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.
WHAT DOES HE MEAN "NOTHING?"
THE VILTRUMITES AREN'T ATTACKING?
ATTACKING?
HEH... THEY'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THEY'VE DISAPPEARED, MARK. SINCE THE BATTLE OF VILTRUM... THERE'S BEEN NO SIGN OF THEM. IT'S AS THOUGH THEY'VE VANISHED.

GRANTED, SPACE IS A BIG PLACE, AND THEY CAN CERTAINLY TRAVEL GREAT DISTANCES IN LITTLE TIME... BUT WE'VE GOT EYES IN ALL QUADRANTS OF THE GALAXY.

IT WOULD BE VERY HARD TO HIDE FROM US.

WE'VE SEARCHED ALL THE FORMER PLANETS OF THE VILTRUM EMPIRE TO SEE IF SOMEONE MIGHT POSSIBLY BE HARBORING THEM. ***THEY'RE NOT.***

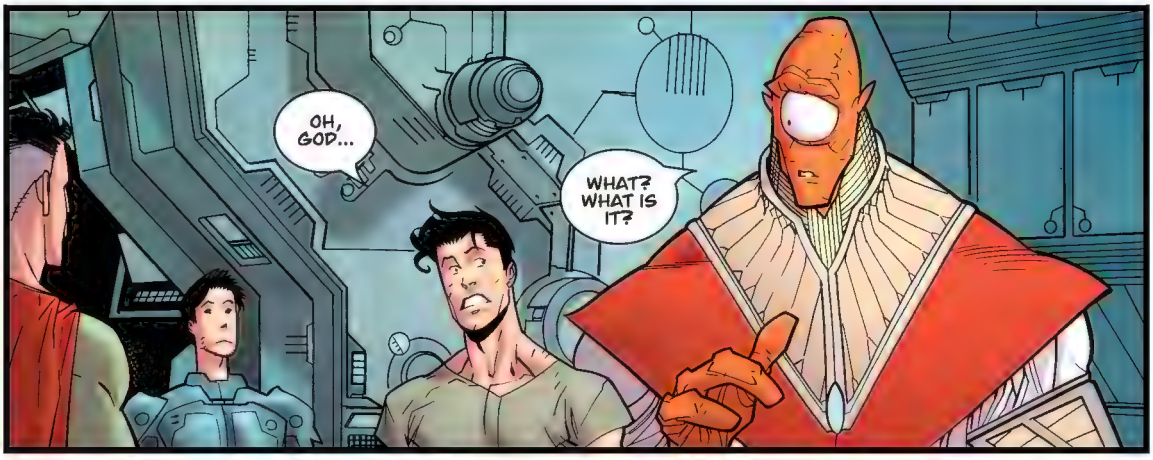
WITHOUT THOSE PLANETS TO BACK THEM, THEIR NUMBERS DWINDLE TO THE POINT THAT ANY FRONTAL ASSAULT AGAINST US WOULD BE INEFFECTIVE AT BEST, ***DISASTROUS*** AT WORST.

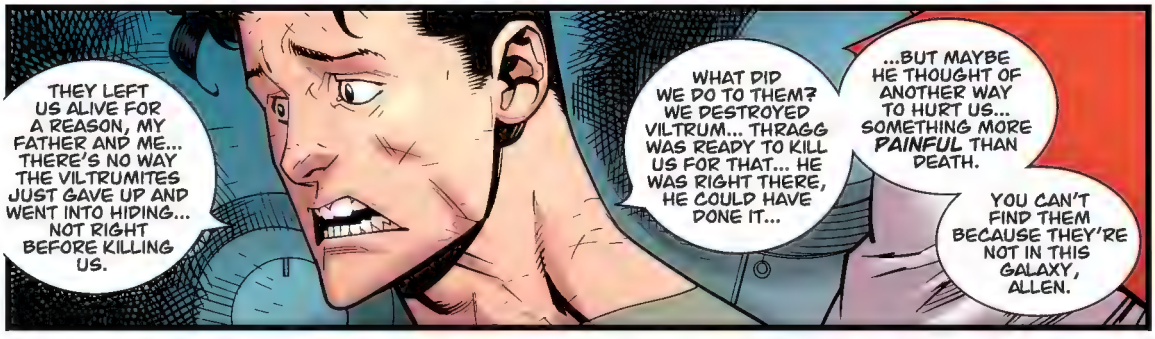
SO IT MAKES SENSE THAT THEY WOULD LAY LOW FOR A WHILE, REGROUP, PREPARE FOR A SERIES OF SMALL, CALCULATED ASSAULTS.

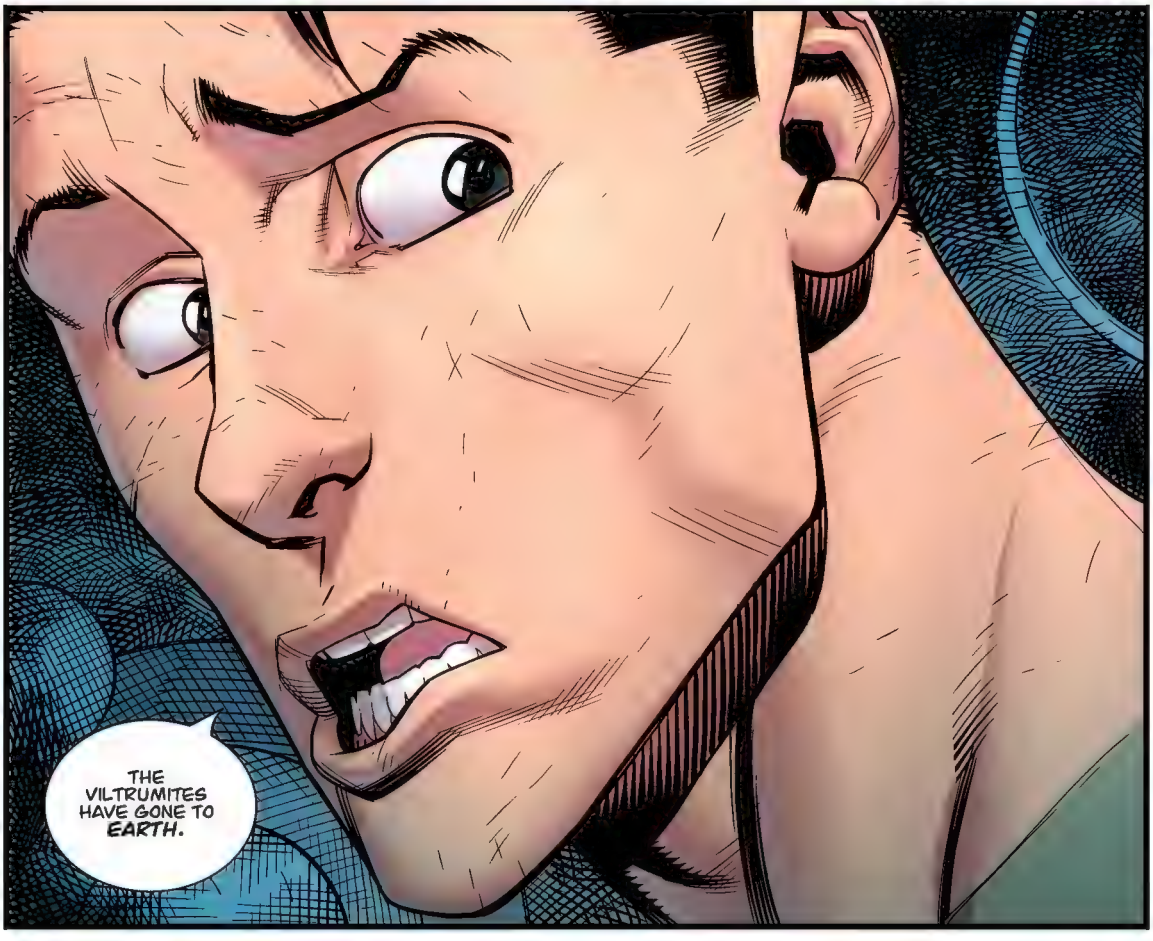
CONVENTIONAL WISDOM WOULD HAVE THEM ATTACKING THEIR FORMERLY OCCUPIED PLANETS, IT WOULD TAKE LITTLE EFFORT TO TURN THEM BACK TO THEIR SIDE... AND EVENTUALLY THEY WOULD AGAIN COMMAND A FORCE LARGE ENOUGH TO DESTROY US.

WE'VE BEEN STATIONING OUR TROOPS WITH THESE PLANETS IN PREPARATION FOR THIS. A DELAY OF THIS LONG, ESPECIALLY WITH THEM KNOWING YOU AND YOUR FATHER AND BROTHER WERE OUT OF COMMISSION FOLLOWING OUR LAST BATTLE... MAKES NO SENSE...

...NO SENSE AT ALL.


OH, GOD...
WHAT? WHAT IS IT?


THEY LEFT US ALIVE FOR A REASON, MY FATHER AND ME... THERE'S NO WAY THE VILTRUMITES JUST GAVE UP AND WENT INTO HIDING... NOT RIGHT BEFORE KILLING US.
WHAT DID WE DO TO THEM? WE DESTROYED VILTRUM... THRAGG WAS READY TO KILL US FOR THAT... HE WAS RIGHT THERE, HE COULD HAVE DONE IT...
...BUT MAYBE HE THOUGHT OF ANOTHER WAY TO HURT US... SOMETHING MORE *PAINFUL* THAN DEATH.
YOU CAN'T FIND THEM BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT IN THIS GALAXY, ALLEN.

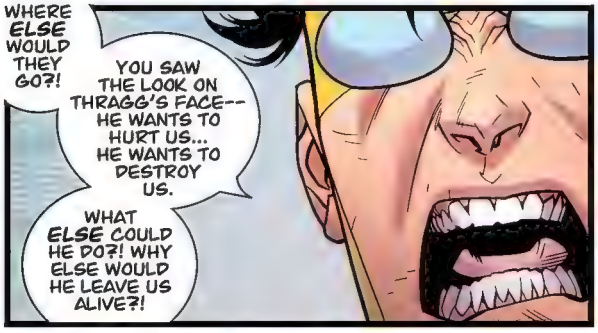

THE VILTRUMITES HAVE GONE TO *EARTH*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PENTAGON
NO, NO PLEASE--
--WAIT!
I--I CAN HELP YOU-- YOU'LL NEED ME. I CAN SMOOTH THINGS OVER...
I CAN PREPARE THE PEOPLE OF THIS PLANET FOR VILTRUMITE RULE... I CAN SMOOTH THINGS OVER SO THAT WE CAN COEXIST ON THIS PLANET AND--
=GKK!=
COEXIST?!
THE TIME FOR THAT HAS PASSED. WE WILL TAKE WHAT WE WANT...
...AND DESTROY THE REST.

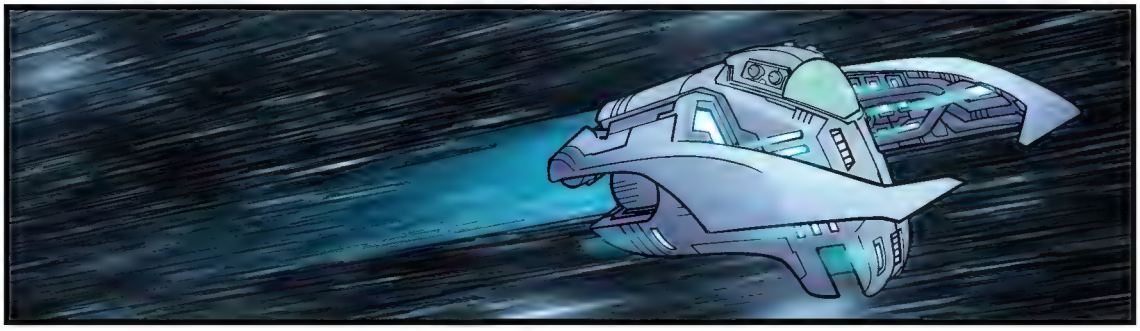
MARK, YOU NEED TO REST.

I CAN'T. ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT IS EARTH... WHAT MUST BE HAPPENING THERE.
DON'T DO THIS TO YOURSELF. WE DON'T EVEN KNOW FOR SURE THAT THE VILTRUMITES WENT THERE.


WHERE ELSE WOULD THEY GO?!
YOU SAW THE LOOK ON THRAGG'S FACE-- HE WANTS TO HURT US... HE WANTS TO DESTROY US.
WHAT ELSE COULD HE DO?! WHY ELSE WOULD HE LEAVE US ALIVE?!

MARK, PLEASE... CALM DOWN.
IT'S STILL A COUPLE MORE DAYS BEFORE WE REACH EARTH. YOU CAN'T DRIVE YOURSELF CRAZY LIKE THIS.
WE'RE DEALING WITH IT, THIS IS THE FASTEST SHIP THE COALITION HAS. THIS IS ALL WE CAN DO.

TRY TO RELAX.

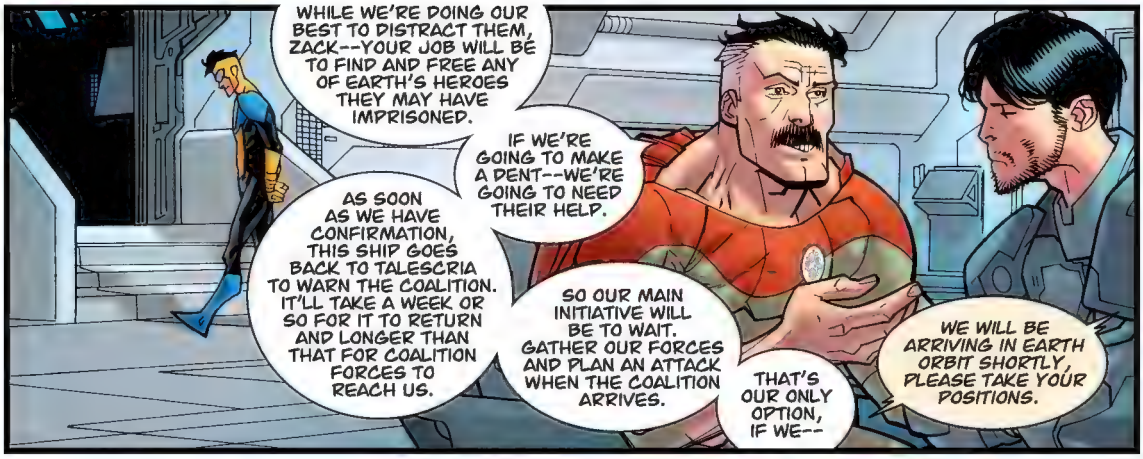


TALESCRIA, HEADQUARTERS OF THE COALITION OF PLANETS.
THE MOVERS WON'T BE HERE FOR AT LEAST TWENTY MINUTES. PLENTY OF TIME IF YOU WANT TO--
TELIA, PLEASE... NOT NOW.
YOUR FRIENDS WILL BE FINE. THOSE VILTRUMITES PROBABLY JUST WENT INTO HIDING.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THEM. I BET WE DON'T HEAR FROM THEM FOR YEARS.
I DO NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF TIME TO WORRY ABOUT THE VILTRUMITES. I COMMAND ALL THE PLANETS IN THE COALITION, NOW... I'VE GOT FAR TOO MUCH TO WORRY ABOUT.
STILL, I CAN'T STAND THAT WE JUST DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY WENT... PART OF ME, I HATE TO ADMIT, WISHES THEY DID GO TO EARTH... AT LEAST THEN, WE'D KNOW.
BUT... THAT'S NOT ALL OF IT...
OH, ALLEN, BABY... WHAT IS IT?
I MISS MY FRIEND... TECH JACKET.

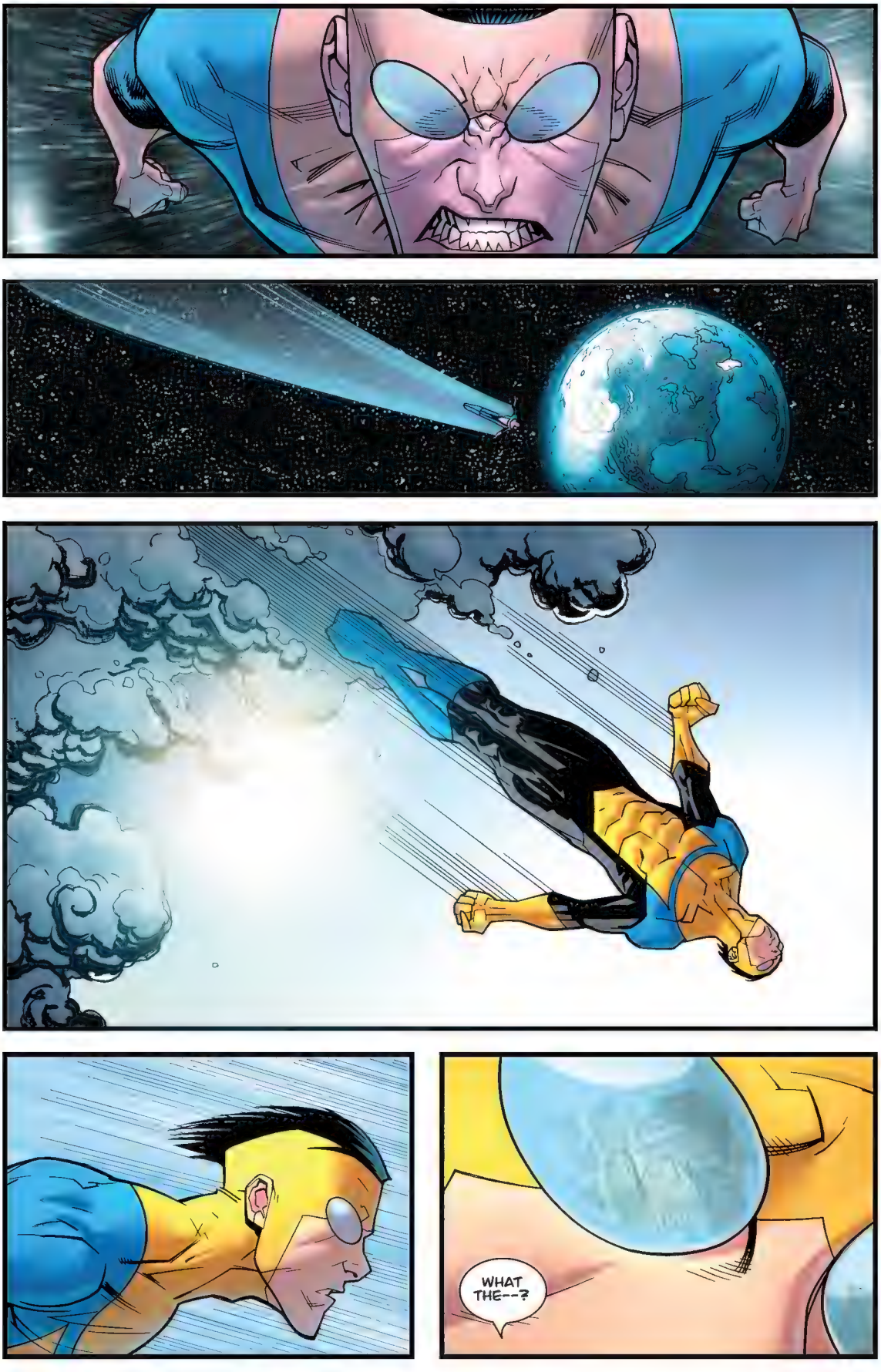
I KNOW I'M NOWHERE NEAR AS STRONG AS YOU GUYS--BUT I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW, WHATEVER WE'RE HEADING INTO, WHATEVER WE'RE UP AGAINST...
I'M TOTALLY THERE FOR YOU.
EARTH IS MY HOME, TOO--AND I'M GOING TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO TAKE OUT AS MANY VILTRUMITES AS I CAN.
ALLEN LET ME KEEP A LOT OF THE WEAPONS THEY ARMED ME WITH THAT WERE MADE FROM THE THINGS YOU'D WRITTEN ABOUT IN YOUR BOOKS, NOLAN--AND I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT HOW I'LL BEST USE THEM TO STAY IN THE FIGHT AND KEEP THEM FROM GETTING NEAR ME.
I CAN ASSURE YOU, I'LL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO--
--HELP SAVE EARTH FROM THOSE DUDES...
...AND THEN I'M GOING TO MAKE SWEET LOVE TO YOUR FACES IN CELEBRATION.
YOU GUYS SUCK.

I WORRY ABOUT OLIVER.
HE'S PROBABLY AWAKE BY NOW.
I HATE THAT WE LEFT HIM BEHIND. IN HIS CONDITION... IF THE VILTRUMITES ARE INDEED ON EARTH--IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. HE WOULDN'T SURVIVE ANOTHER ATTACK.
BUT I IMAGINE WHEN HE AWAKENS HE'S GOING TO BE DISORIENTED-- TALESCRIA CAN BE AN UNUSUAL PLACE-- AND HE'S THERE ALONE.
I--LOOK AT ME, WORRYING ABOUT HIM. THESE DAMN HUMAN EMOTIONS, I CAN'T SHAKE THEM. I TOO AM CONCERNED FOR EARTH... YOUR MOTHER. I CAN'T HELP IT...
WERE THESE EMOTIONS ALWAYS THERE, BURIED UNDER THE SURFACE? COULD EARTH HAVE CHANGED ME THIS MUCH?
I DON'T--
MARK?

PITY YOUR SON WASN'T HERE TO SEE THIS.
I'M SORRY, DAD... WERE YOU SAYING SOMETHING?
IT'S NOT IMPORTANT.
GET AWAY FROM THAT WINDOW... AND CLEAR YOUR HEAD. STOP THINKING ABOUT WHAT MAY BE HAPPENING UNTIL WE ACTUALLY KNOW SOMETHING.
COME, LET'S GET SOMETHING TO EAT.

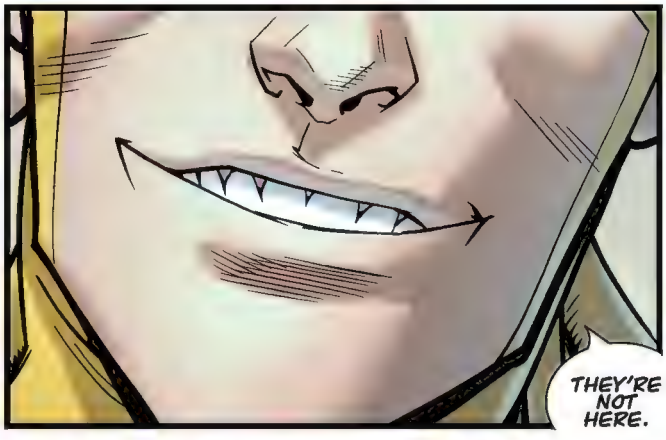

WHILE WE'RE DOING OUR BEST TO DISTRACT THEM, ZACK--YOUR JOB WILL BE TO FIND AND FREE ANY OF EARTH'S HEROES THEY MAY HAVE IMPRISONED.
IF WE'RE GOING TO MAKE A DENT--WE'RE GOING TO NEED THEIR HELP.
AS SOON AS WE HAVE CONFIRMATION, THIS SHIP GOES BACK TO TALESCRIA TO WARN THE COALITION. IT'LL TAKE A WEEK OR SO FOR IT TO RETURN AND LONGER THAN THAT FOR COALITION FORCES TO REACH US.
SO OUR MAIN INITIATIVE WILL BE TO WAIT. GATHER OUR FORCES AND PLAN AN ATTACK WHEN THE COALITION ARRIVES.
THAT'S OUR ONLY OPTION, IF WE--
WE WILL BE ARRIVING IN EARTH ORBIT SHORTLY, PLEASE TAKE YOUR POSITIONS.

MARK?! WHAT ARE YOU--?!


WHAT THE--?

DID YOU SEE ANY--
NOTHING... I DON'T SEE ANY--

ME NEITHER.
THEY'RE NOT HERE.


THEY'RE NOT HERE.

MARK?

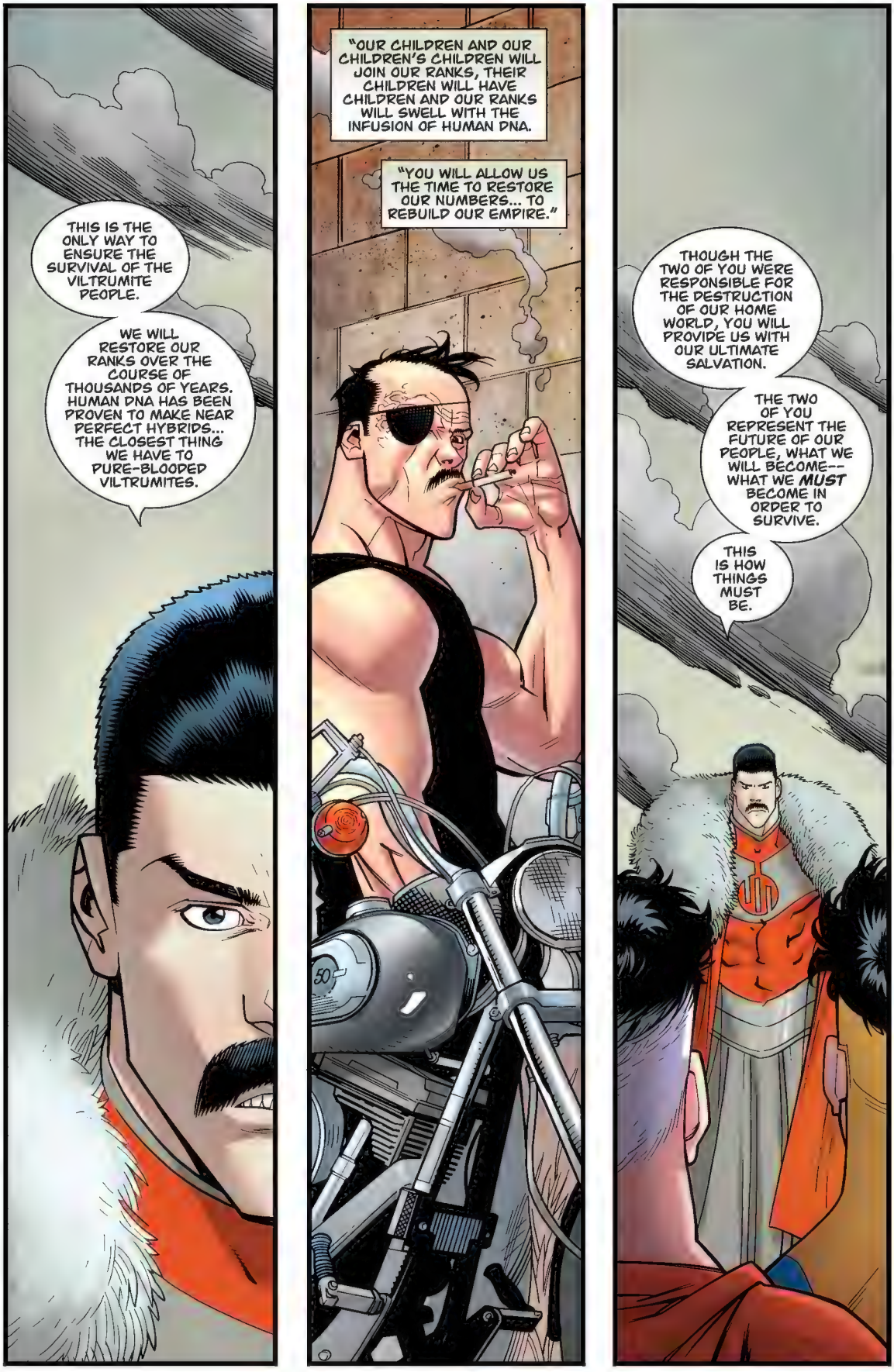
WE VERY MUCH ARE HERE.

I SWEAR IF YOU'VE DONE ANYTHING TO THIS PLANET... TO THESE PEOPLE...
I'LL...
I KILLED CONQUEST. I'LL FIND A WAY TO KILL YOU.
MARK!
I--
WRAMM!
I HAVE DONE NOTHING TO THIS PLANET.
NOT YET.

YOU CAN FIGHT ME IF YOU WISH, BUT I AM NOT ALONE HERE.
IF BY CHANCE YOU WERE ABLE TO INJURE ME, I COULDN'T GUARANTEE THE REST OF MY FORCES WOULDN'T LAY WASTE TO THIS PLANET.
I SUGGEST THAT WE TALK, THE THREE OF US.
YOUR CHOICE. FIGHT OR TALK.
TALK.
WISE CHOICE... I AM PLEASED.
I HAVE COME TO OFFER YOU A TRUCE. THERE ARE EXACTLY THIRTY-SEVEN OF US LEFT ALIVE, SOME OF US SEVERELY INJURED.
THAT IS ENOUGH TO TEAR THIS PLANET IN HALF, KILLING EVERY LIVING CREATURE HERE, AND THERE IS NOTHING YOU COULD DO TO STOP THAT.
AND IT WOULD BE FAIR RETALIATION FOR WHAT YOU DID TO OUR HOME WORLD.

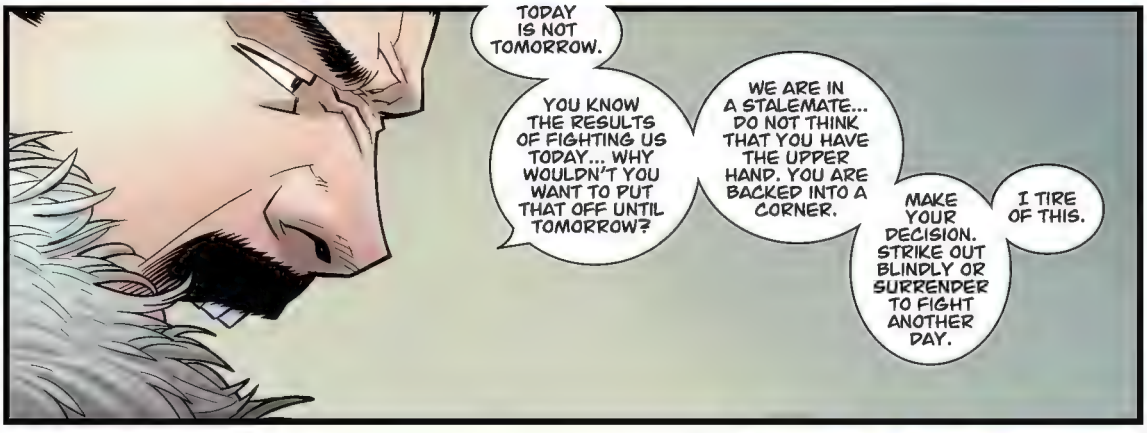
BUT I WAS NOT MADE GRAND REGENT OF THE VILTRUM EMPIRE FOR REVENGE.
I WAS MADE TO RULE IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF OUR PEOPLE... AND I HAVE LEARNED...
...THIS IS NOT A WAR WE CAN SURVIVE.
SO IT IS OVER, I OFFER OUR SURRENDER, UNDER ONE CONDITION.
YOU TOOK OUR PLANET... NOW WE'RE GOING TO TAKE YOURS.
WHAT?!
WE ARE ALREADY HERE.
WE DO NOT WISH TO LEAVE.
ARE YOU INSANE? I'LL NEVER--
BEFORE YOU OVERREACT, TAKE NOTICE OF THE FACT THAT YOU COULDN'T MAKE US LEAVE IF YOU WANTED TO.
WHAT I PROPOSE IS THIS...

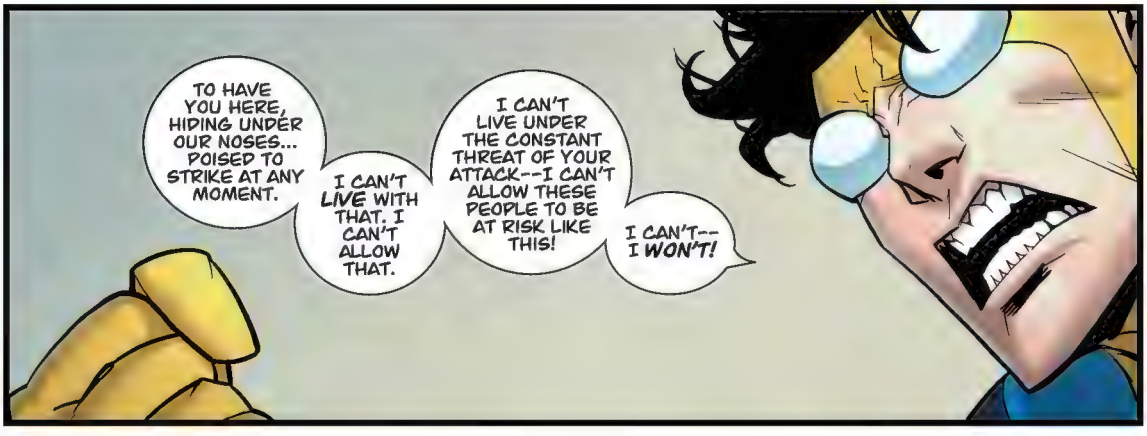
"WE WILL LIVE AMONG YOU. THE PEOPLE OF EARTH WILL NOT EVEN KNOW WE ARE HERE.
"YOU WILL NOT EVEN KNOW WE ARE HERE."
YOU WILL HAVE NO CONTACT WITH US. WE WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH ANY MATTERS ON EARTH. WE DO NOT WANT OUR PRESENCE TO BE KNOWN.
WE WILL NOT ATTACK YOU... BUT WE WILL NOT HELP YOU.
"MY PEOPLE WILL BLEND IN, LIVE AS HUMANS WITH HUMANS. WE WILL INTERMINGLE...
"...WE WILL INTERBREED."

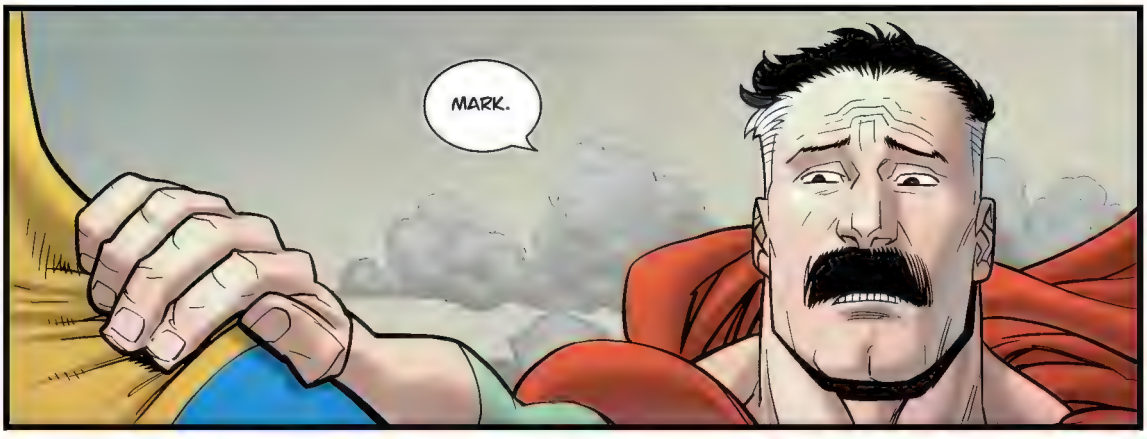

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF THE VILTRUMITE PEOPLE.
WE WILL RESTORE OUR RANKS OVER THE COURSE OF THOUSANDS OF YEARS. HUMAN DNA HAS BEEN PROVEN TO MAKE NEAR PERFECT HYBRIDS... THE CLOSEST THING WE HAVE TO PURE-BLOODED VILTRUMITES.
"OUR CHILDREN AND OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN WILL JOIN OUR RANKS, THEIR CHILDREN WILL HAVE CHILDREN AND OUR RANKS WILL SWELL WITH THE INFUSION OF HUMAN DNA.
"YOU WILL ALLOW US THE TIME TO RESTORE OUR NUMBERS... TO REBUILD OUR EMPIRE."
THOUGH THE TWO OF YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR HOME WORLD, YOU WILL PROVIDE US WITH OUR ULTIMATE SALVATION.
THE TWO OF YOU REPRESENT THE FUTURE OF OUR PEOPLE, WHAT WE WILL BECOME-- WHAT WE MUST BECOME IN ORDER TO SURVIVE.
THIS IS HOW THINGS MUST BE.

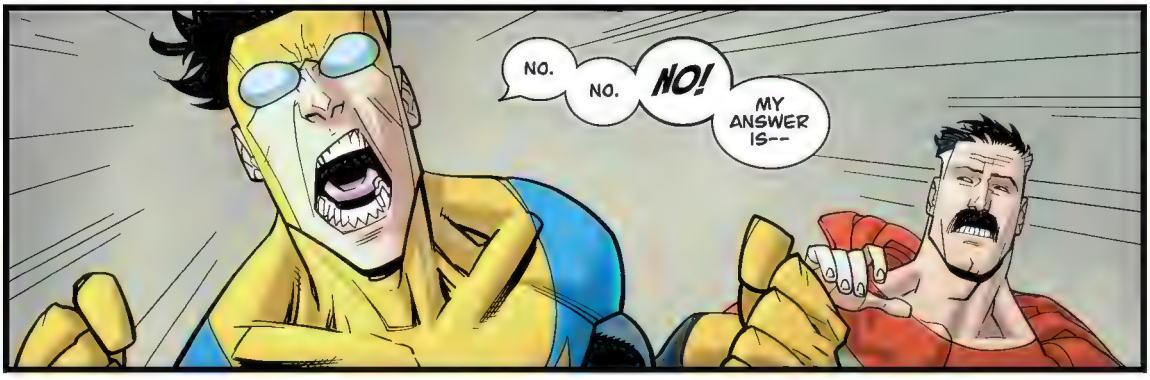
I WILL HAVE YOUR ANSWER NOW.
PLEASE.
DO NOT MAKE ME DESTROY WHAT COULD BE OUR LAST HOPE FOR SURVIVAL.

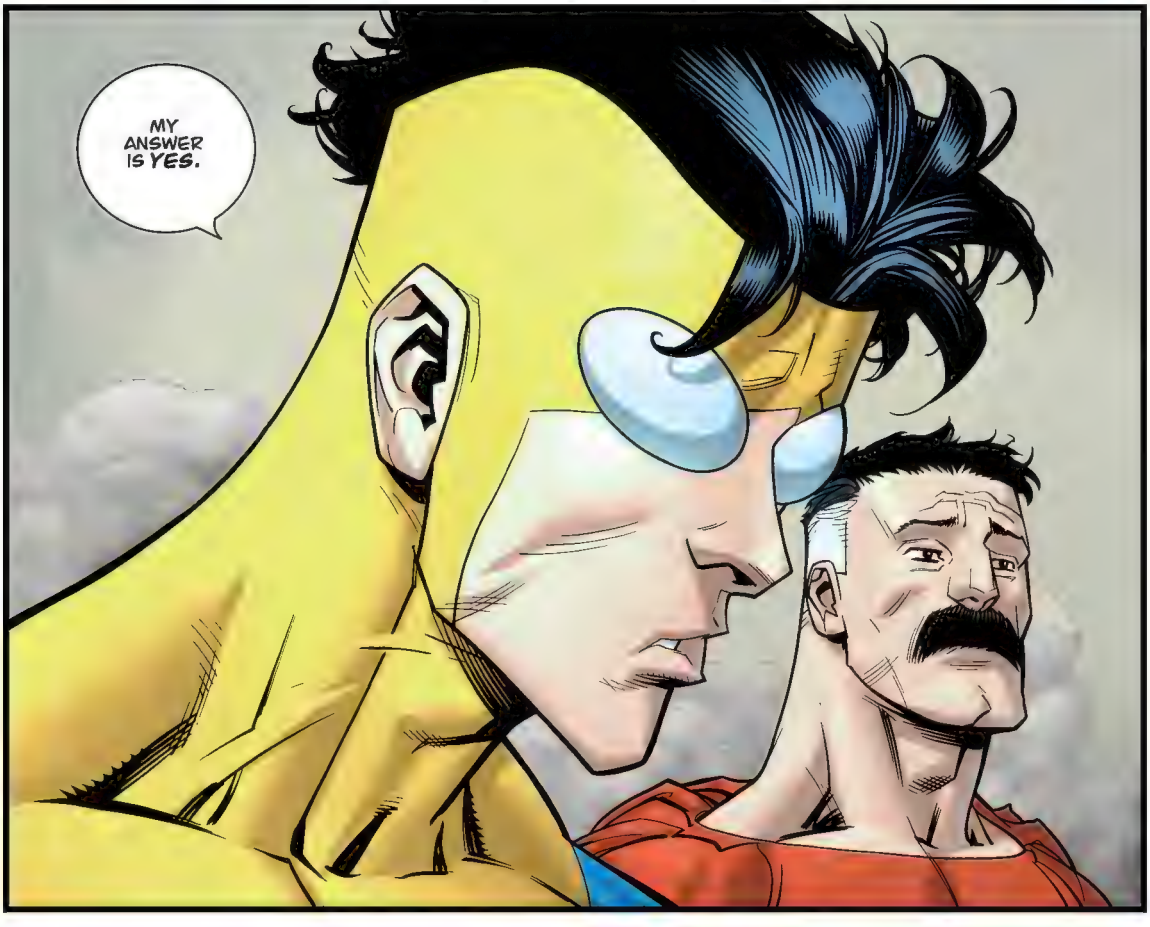
WHAT YOU ARE PROPOSING... YOU WANT US TO WAIT AND RESUME OUR FIGHT WHEN THERE ARE MORE OF YOU-- AND YOU ARE STRONGER?
HOW COULD I AGREE TO THAT?


TODAY IS NOT TOMORROW.
YOU KNOW THE RESULTS OF FIGHTING US TODAY... WHY WOULDN'T YOU WANT TO PUT THAT OFF UNTIL TOMORROW?
WE ARE IN A STALEMATE... DO NOT THINK THAT YOU HAVE THE UPPER HAND. YOU ARE BACKED INTO A CORNER.
I TIRE OF THIS.
MAKE YOUR DECISION. STRIKE OUT BLINDLY OR SURRENDER TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.

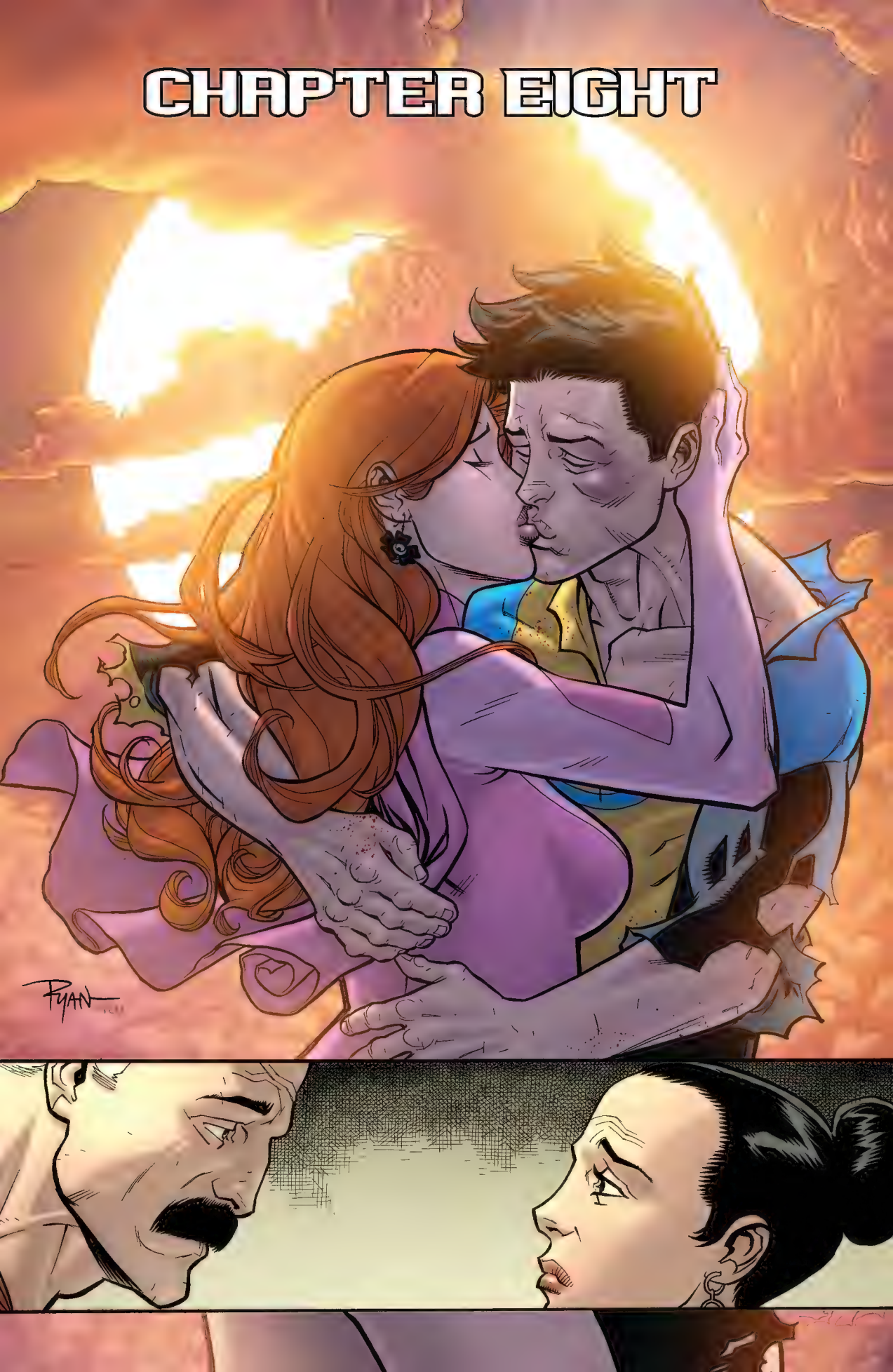

TO HAVE YOU HERE, HIDING UNDER OUR NOSES... POISED TO STRIKE AT ANY MOMENT.
I CAN'T LIVE WITH THAT. I CAN'T ALLOW THAT.
I CAN'T LIVE UNDER THE CONSTANT THREAT OF YOUR ATTACK--I CAN'T ALLOW THESE PEOPLE TO BE AT RISK LIKE THIS!
I CAN'T-- I WON'T!


MARK.


NO.
NO.
NO!
MY ANSWER IS--

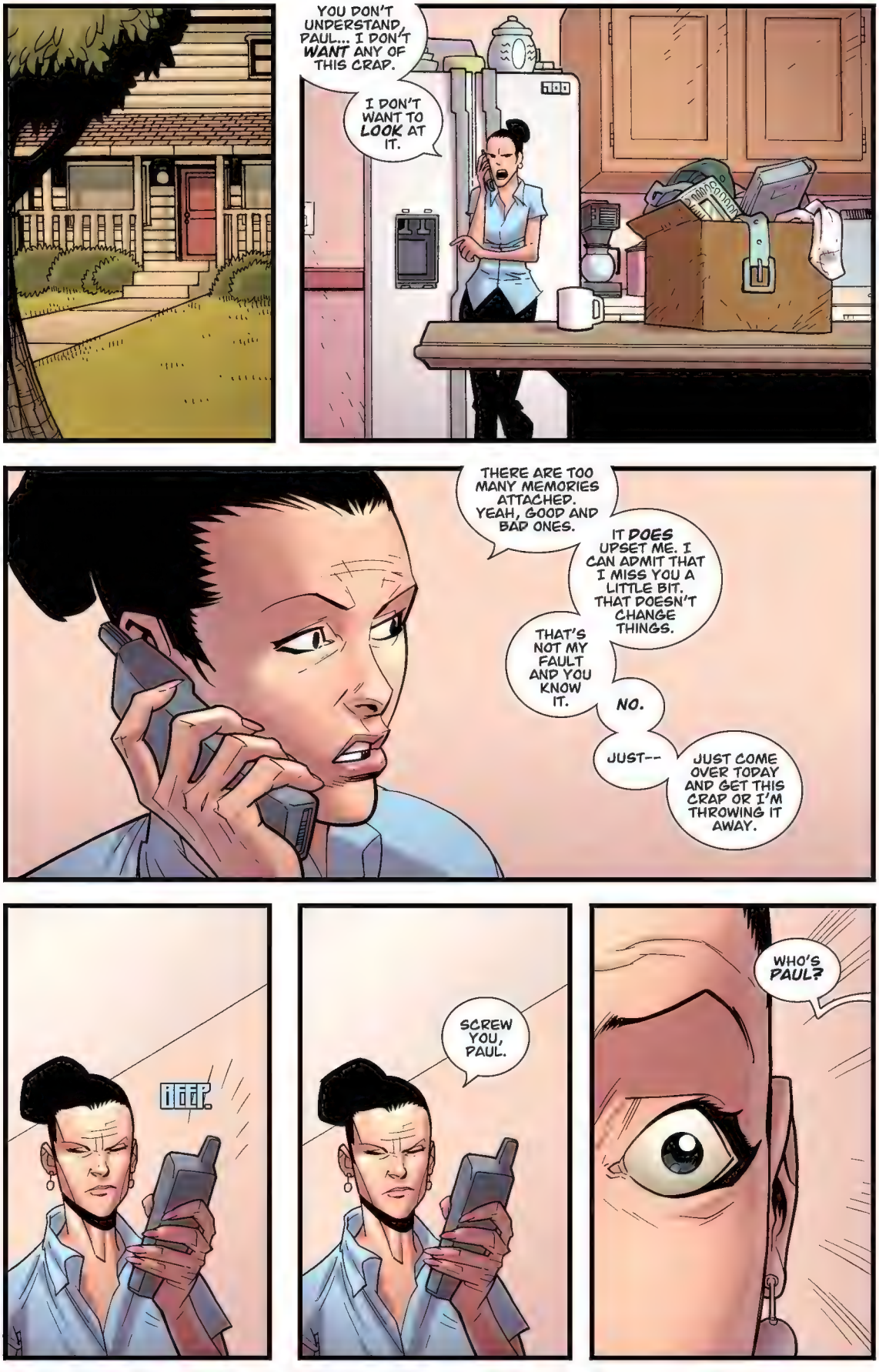

MY ANSWER IS YES.

CHAPTER EIGHT



YOU HAVE CHOSEN WISELY.
YOU HAVE MY WORD. WHILE WE LIVE AMONG YOU, NO HARM WILL COME TO YOUR PEOPLE BY THE HAND OF ANY VILTRUMITE.
THE TRUTH IS, BY ALLOWING US TO LIVE HERE, THE TWO OF YOU MAY VERY WELL HAVE BECOME THE SAVIORS OF OUR PEOPLE.
IRONIC.
MY GOD...
WHAT HAVE I DONE?
YOU HAVE SAVED THE LIVES OF EVERY LIVING THING ON THIS PLANET.
YOU WILL NOT HEAR FROM ME AGAIN.
I LEAVE YOU.

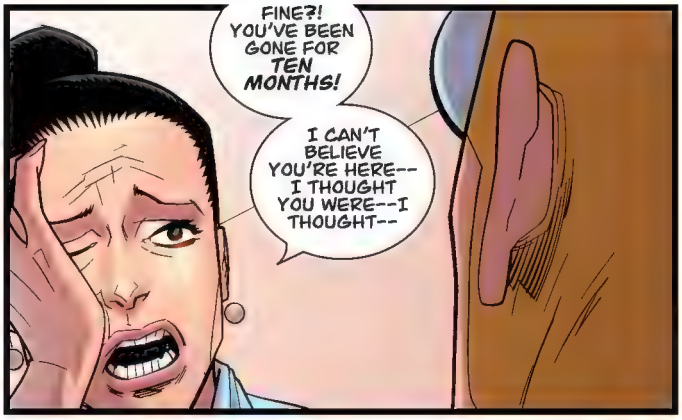
BOY, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP UP WITH YOU GUYS.
WHAT'S THE WORD?
THE WAR IS OVER.
OH, MAN! AWESOME NEWS!
WAY COOL!
I NEVER REALLY SAID GOODBYE TO ALLEN.
WAIT, I THOUGHT WE'D BE GOING BACK TO TALESCRIA.
UH...
GUYS?
JERKS.

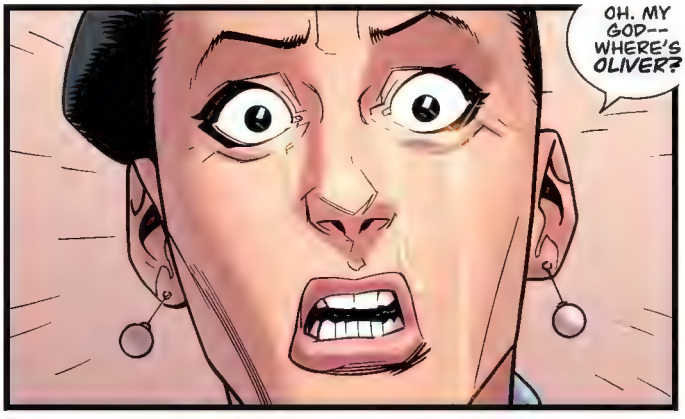

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, PAUL... I DON'T WANT ANY OF THIS CRAP.
I DON'T WANT TO LOOK AT IT.
THERE ARE TOO MANY MEMORIES ATTACHED. YEAH, GOOD AND BAD ONES.
IT DOES UPSET ME. I CAN ADMIT THAT I MISS YOU A LITTLE BIT. THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THINGS.
THAT'S NOT MY FAULT AND YOU KNOW IT.
NO.
JUST--
JUST COME OVER TODAY AND GET THIS CRAP OR I'M THROWING IT AWAY.
click.
SCREW YOU, PAUL.
WHO'S PAUL?

HI, MOM.

OH, MY GOD.
OH, MY GOD!

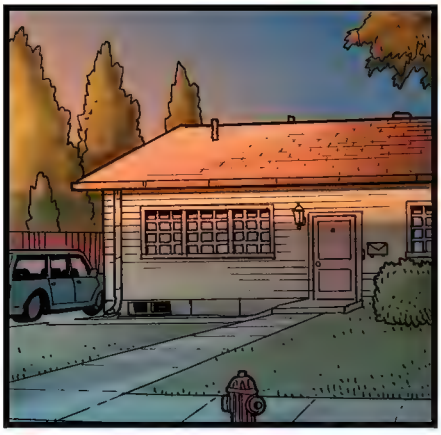
YOU'RE SAFE-- YOU'RE ALIVE!
I'M FINE, MOM... I'M FINE.

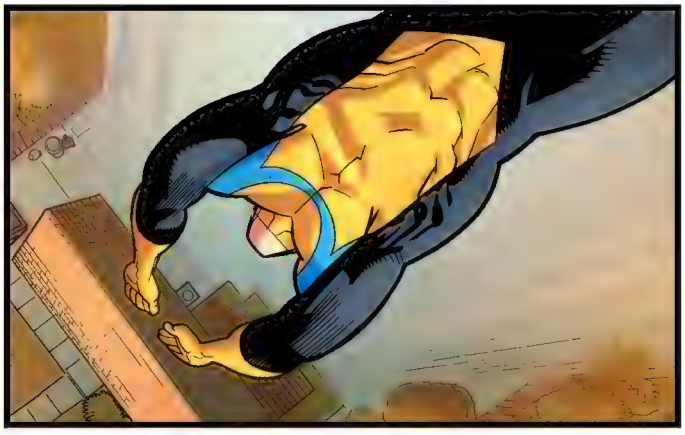

FINE?! YOU'VE BEEN GONE FOR TEN MONTHS!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE HERE-- I THOUGHT YOU WERE--I THOUGHT--

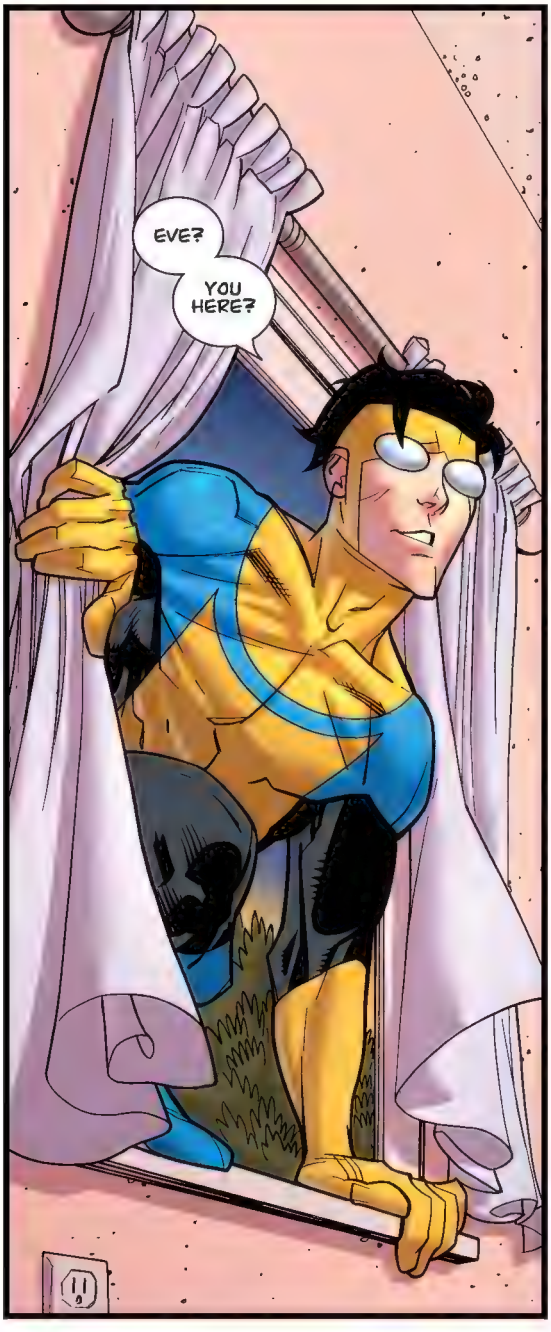

OH. MY GOD-- WHERE'S OLIVER?

OLIVER IS FINE. HE WAS INJURED, BUT HE'S ALIVE.
HE'S ON TALESCRIA, THEY HAVE THE FINEST DOCTORS, HE'S WELL TAKEN CARE OF.
WHO IS PAUL?
MARK, YOU SHOULD GO SEE EVE... SHE'S NOT DOING SO WELL.
WHAT?
OKAY... I'LL BE BACK.

OH...
YOU TOOK ANOTHER MATE...
"MATE?!" MORE LIKE... COMPANION--AND... ARE YOU SERIOUSLY UPSET OVER THIS?!
HOW MANY ALIEN BUG PEOPLE WERE YOU SLEEPING WITH BEFORE OLIVER CAME ALONG?!
I'M NOT UPSET... SIMPLY...
...DISAPPOINTED.
ANYWAY, HE'S MY EX-BOYFRIEND NOW. WITH MARK GONE, I JUST WASN'T THERE FOR HIM AND HE COULDN'T--
SORRY TO BARGE IN LIKE THIS, WE DETECTED ATMOSPHERIC PENETRATION, THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE MARK AND--
GAH!
BLAMM!
NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, CECIL.
YEAH, UH... MARK HAD TOLD ME YOU'D REFORMED... SORRY...
...REFLEX.
SO... DOES THIS MEAN THE WAR'S OVER?

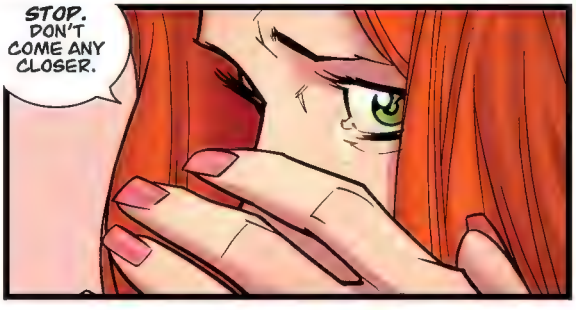


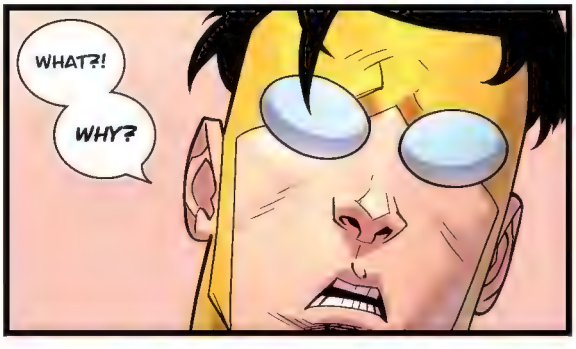


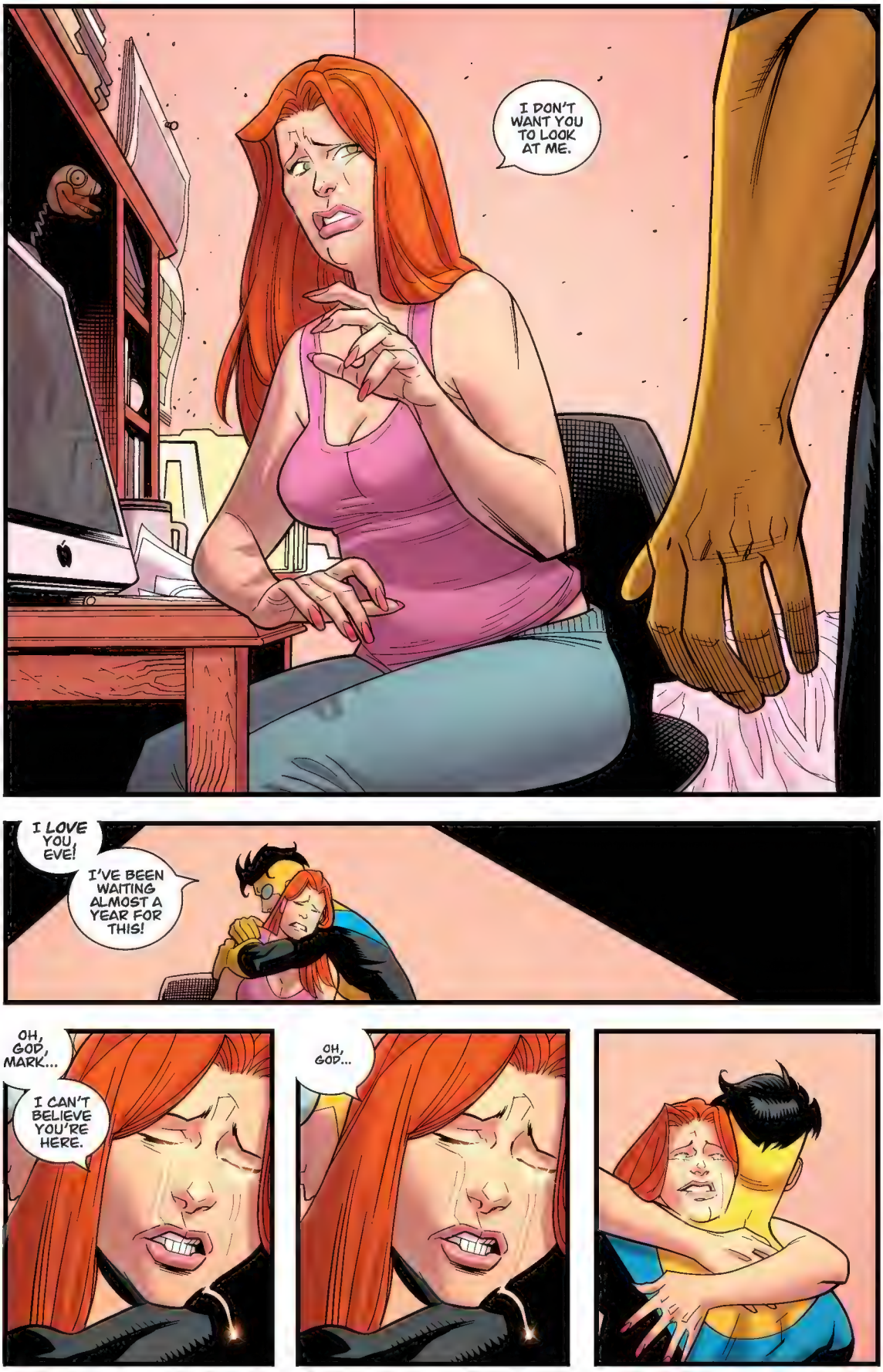

EVE?
YOU HERE?

MARK?
OHGH

IT'S ME! WAR'S OVER... I'M BACK!
NOW, FINALLY... EVERYTHING CAN GO BACK TO NORMAL.

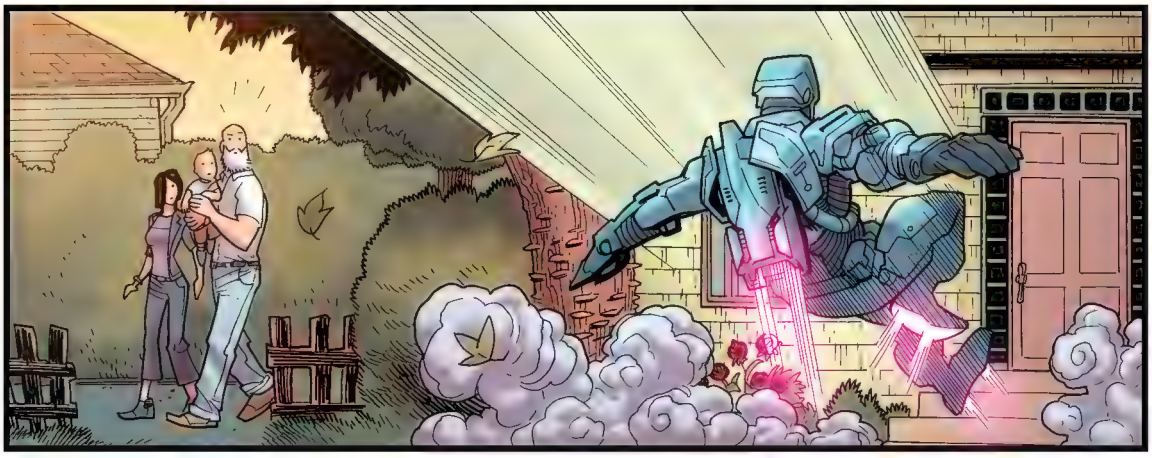

STOP. DON'T COME ANY CLOSER.

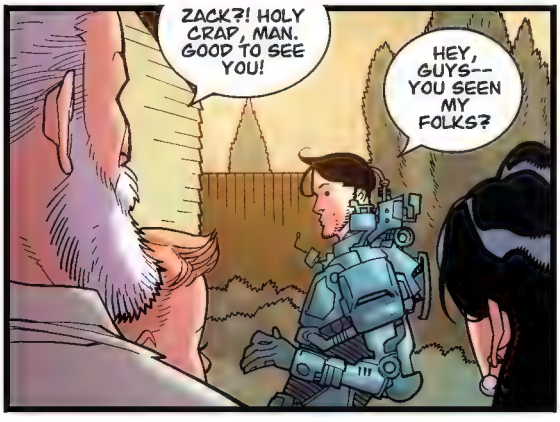

WHAT?!
WHY?

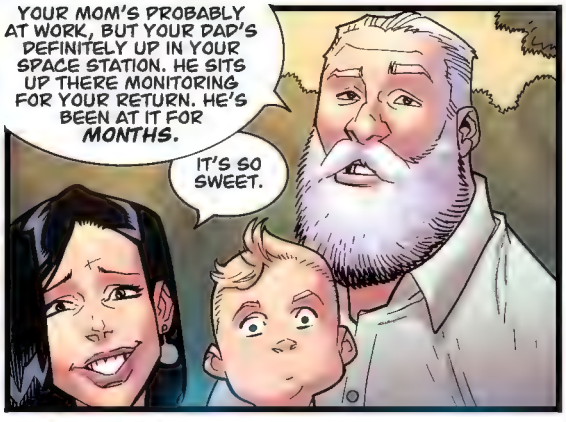

I DON'T WANT YOU TO LOOK AT ME.
I LOVE YOU, EVE!
I'VE BEEN WAITING ALMOST A YEAR FOR THIS!
OH, GOD, MARK...
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE HERE.
OH, GOD...

UNITED STATES
PENTAGON
=SIGH.=
BEEP.
OKAY--PACK IT UP PEOPLE... WE'RE NOT GOING TO NEED, WELL... PRETTY MUCH ANY OF THIS.
WAR'S OVER.

BUMMER.



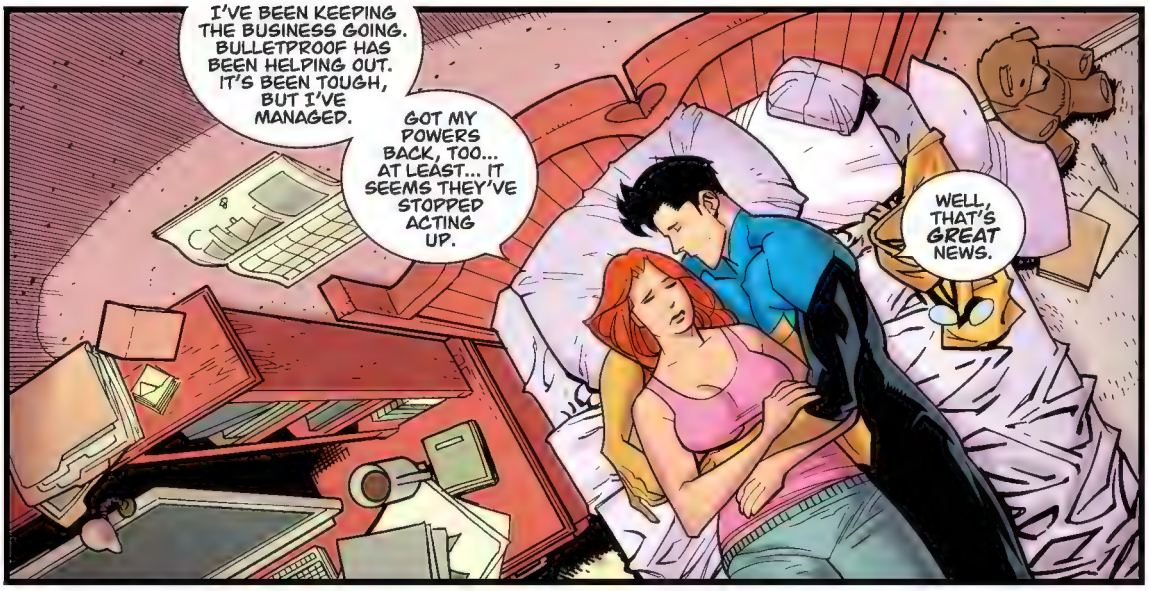

ZACK?! HOLY CRAP, MAN. GOOD TO SEE YOU!
HEY, GUYS-- YOU SEEN MY FOLKS?


YOUR MOM'S PROBABLY AT WORK, BUT YOUR DAD'S DEFINITELY UP IN YOUR SPACE STATION. HE SITS UP THERE MONITORING FOR YOUR RETURN. HE'S BEEN AT IT FOR MONTHS.
IT'S SO SWEET.

DAD?

ZACK?!
OH, MY GOD, ZACK!

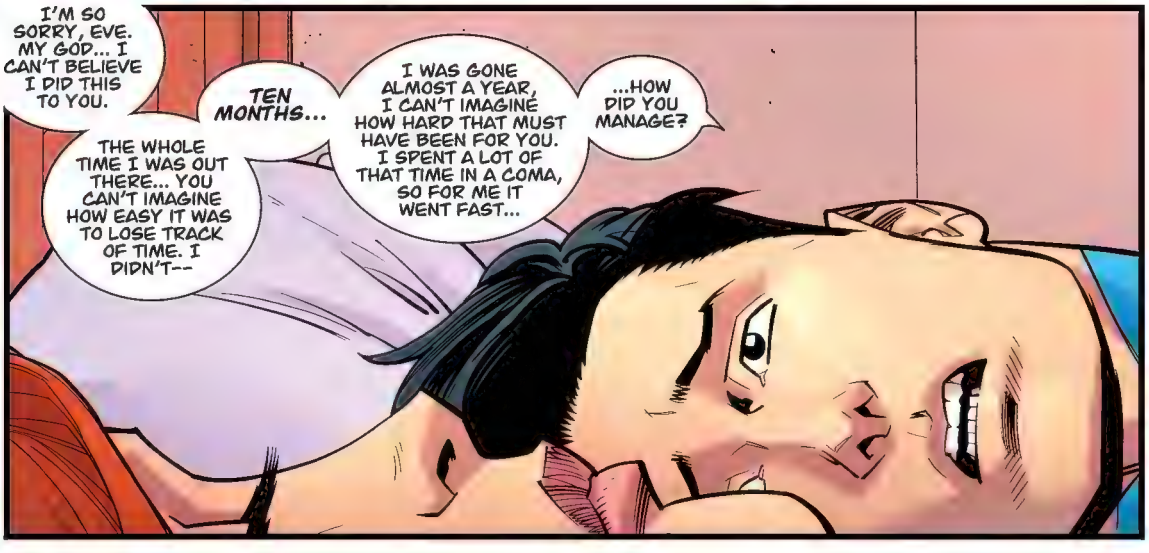
YOU GREW A BEARD!

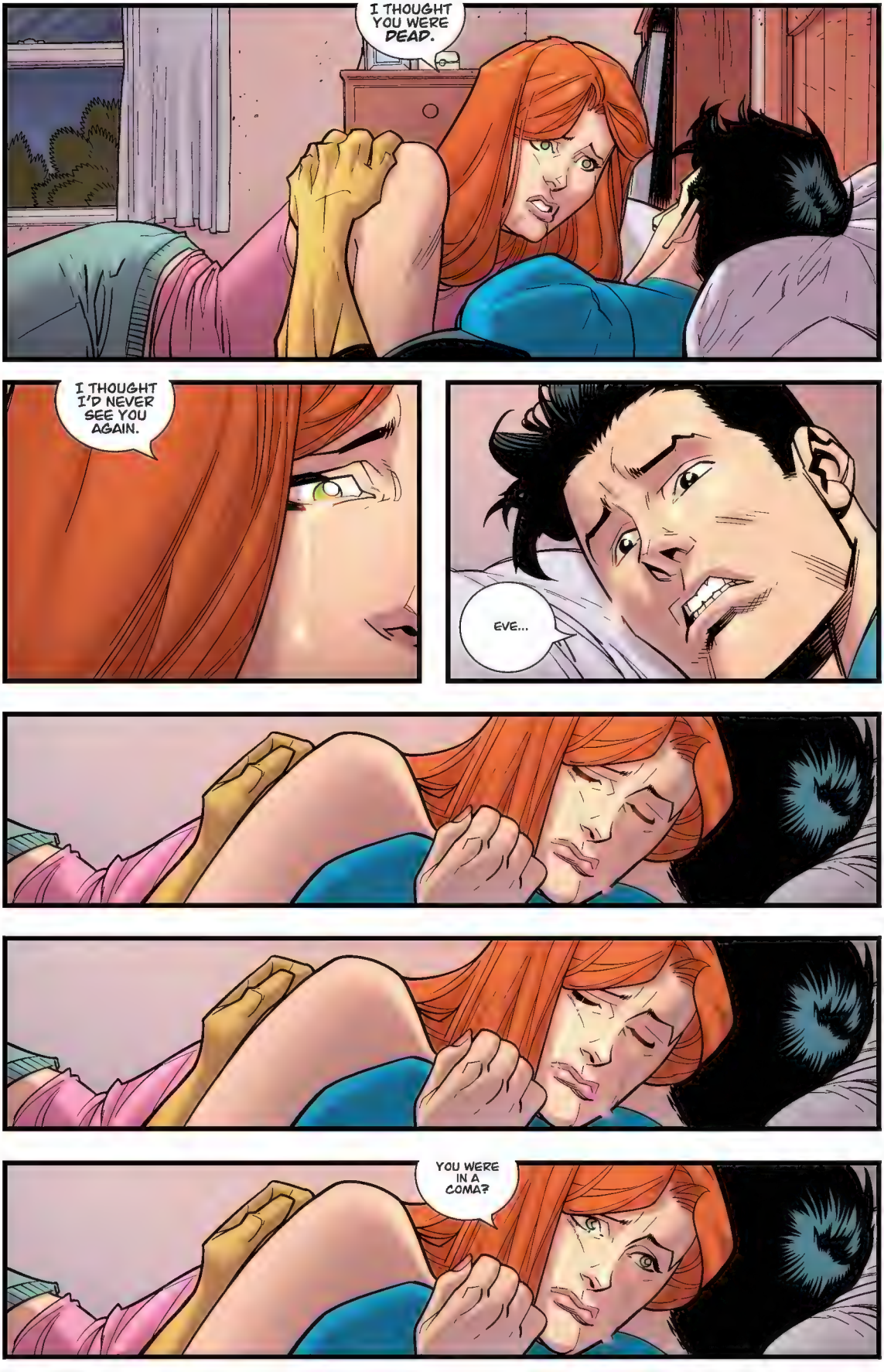

I'VE BEEN KEEPING THE BUSINESS GOING. BULLETPROOF HAS BEEN HELPING OUT. IT'S BEEN TOUGH, BUT I'VE MANAGED.
GOT MY POWERS BACK, TOO... AT LEAST... IT SEEMS THEY'VE STOPPED ACTING UP.
WELL, THAT'S GREAT NEWS.

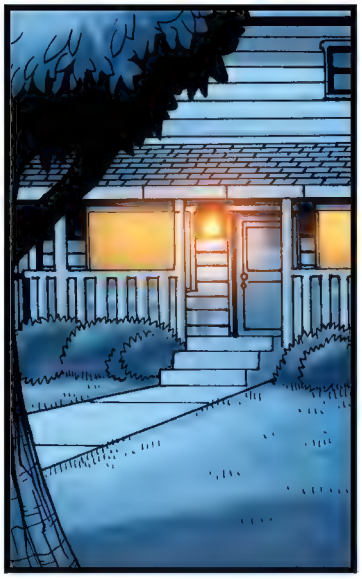
AND YOU'RE STILL LIVING HERE AT HOME?

I'VE GOT MORE THAN ENOUGH MONEY SAVED UP TO BUY SOME LAND, AND WITH MY POWERS WORKING AGAIN I COULD BUILD SOMETHING SIMILAR TO WHAT I HAD IN AFRICA...
BUT WITH YOU GONE...

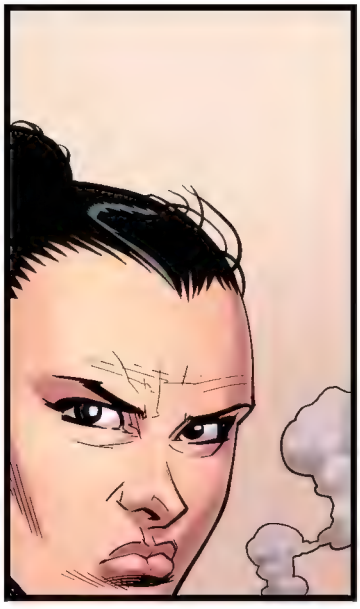
...I JUST DIDN'T SEE THE POINT.


I'M SO SORRY, EVE. MY GOD... I CAN'T BELIEVE I DID THIS TO YOU.
TEN MONTHS...
THE WHOLE TIME I WAS OUT THERE... YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW EASY IT WAS TO LOSE TRACK OF TIME. I DIDN'T--
I WAS GONE ALMOST A YEAR, I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW HARD THAT MUST HAVE BEEN FOR YOU. I SPENT A LOT OF THAT TIME IN A COMA, SO FOR ME IT WENT FAST...
...HOW DID YOU MANAGE?


I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD.
I THOUGHT I'D NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN.
EVE...
YOU WERE IN A COMA?



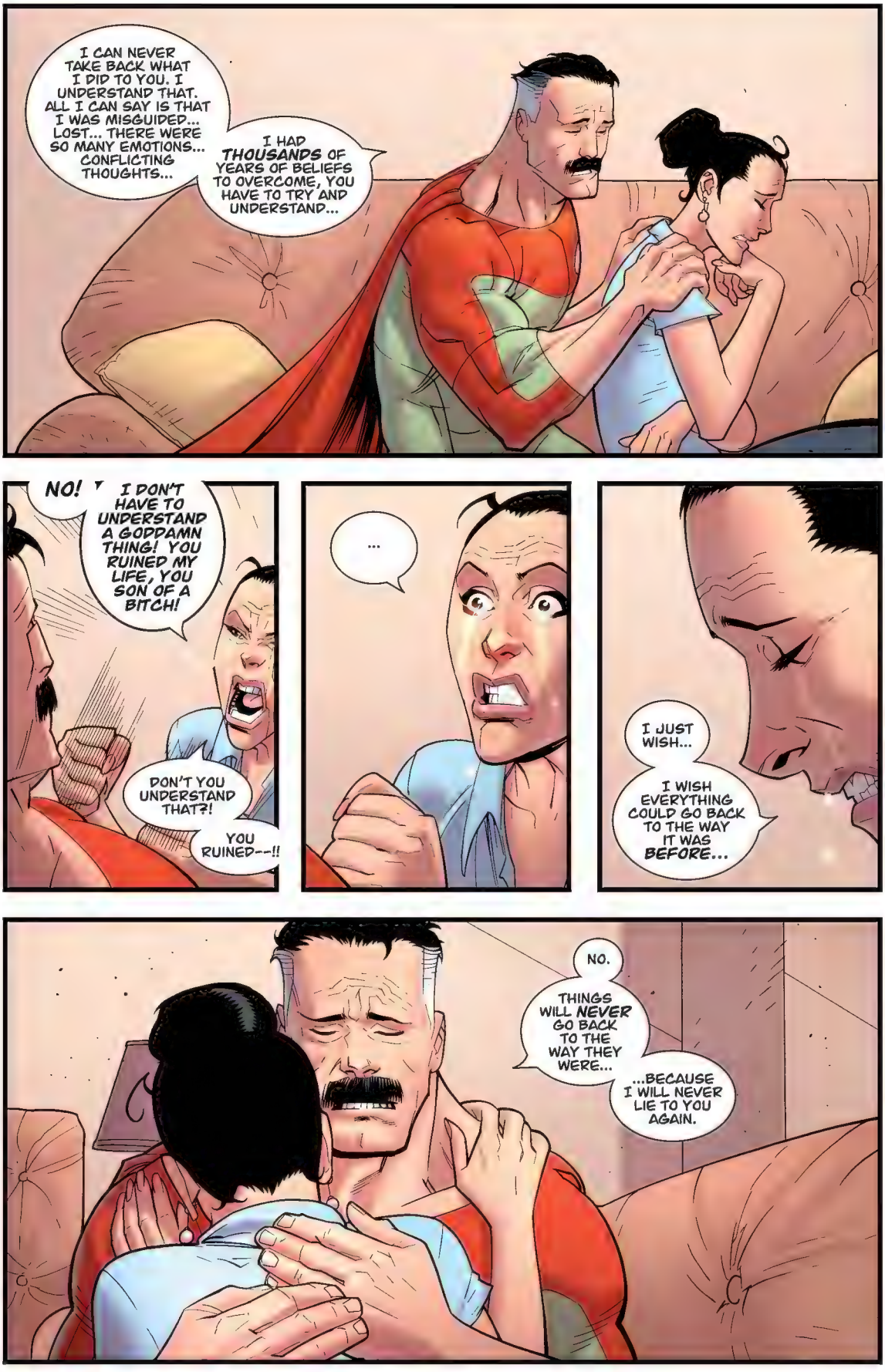
TRUTH IS, AFTER SEEING YOU AGAIN, THINGS WITH PAUL JUST... FELT WRONG. NOT THAT I BELIEVE A WORD OF WHAT YOU SAID.
THAT YOU HAVE FEELINGS FOR ME, THAT YOU REGRET WHAT YOU'VE DONE... THERE'S NO WAY TO COME BACK FROM THAT.
AND YET AFTER SEEING ME YOU COULD NO LONGER STAND TO BE WITH ANOTHER MAN...

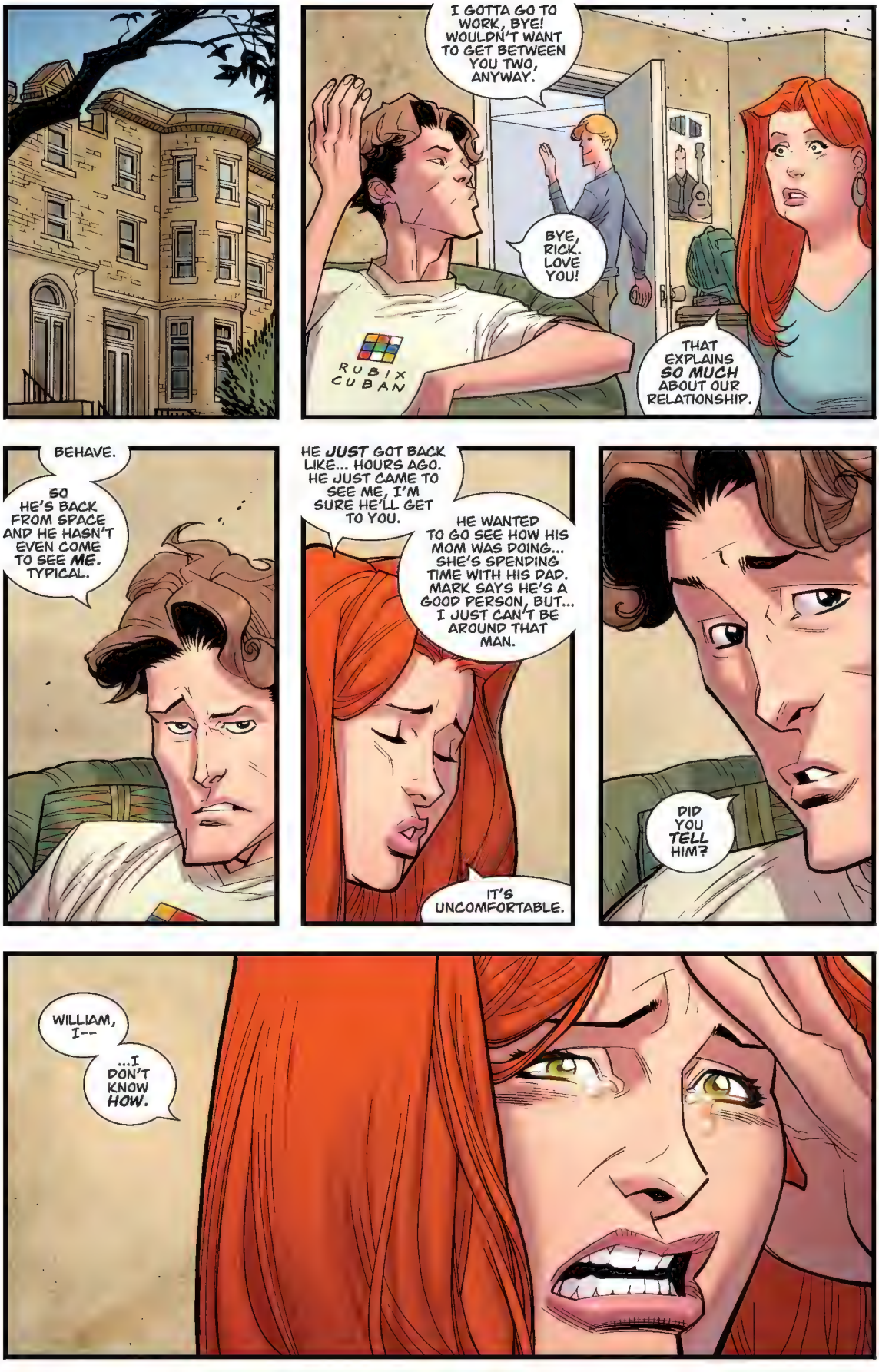


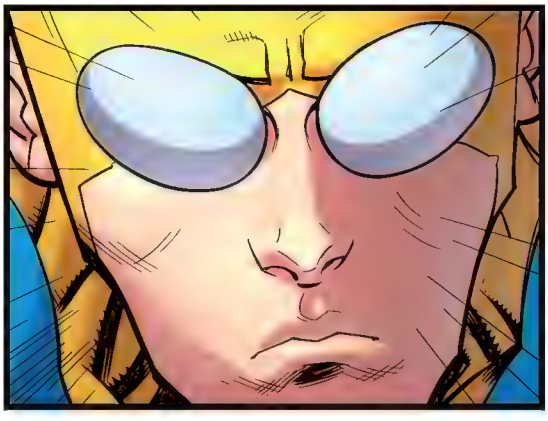
I WISH THAT THERE WERE SOME WAY TO MAKE YOU AWARE OF JUST HOW MUCH I'VE MISSED YOU.

NOLAN, I--

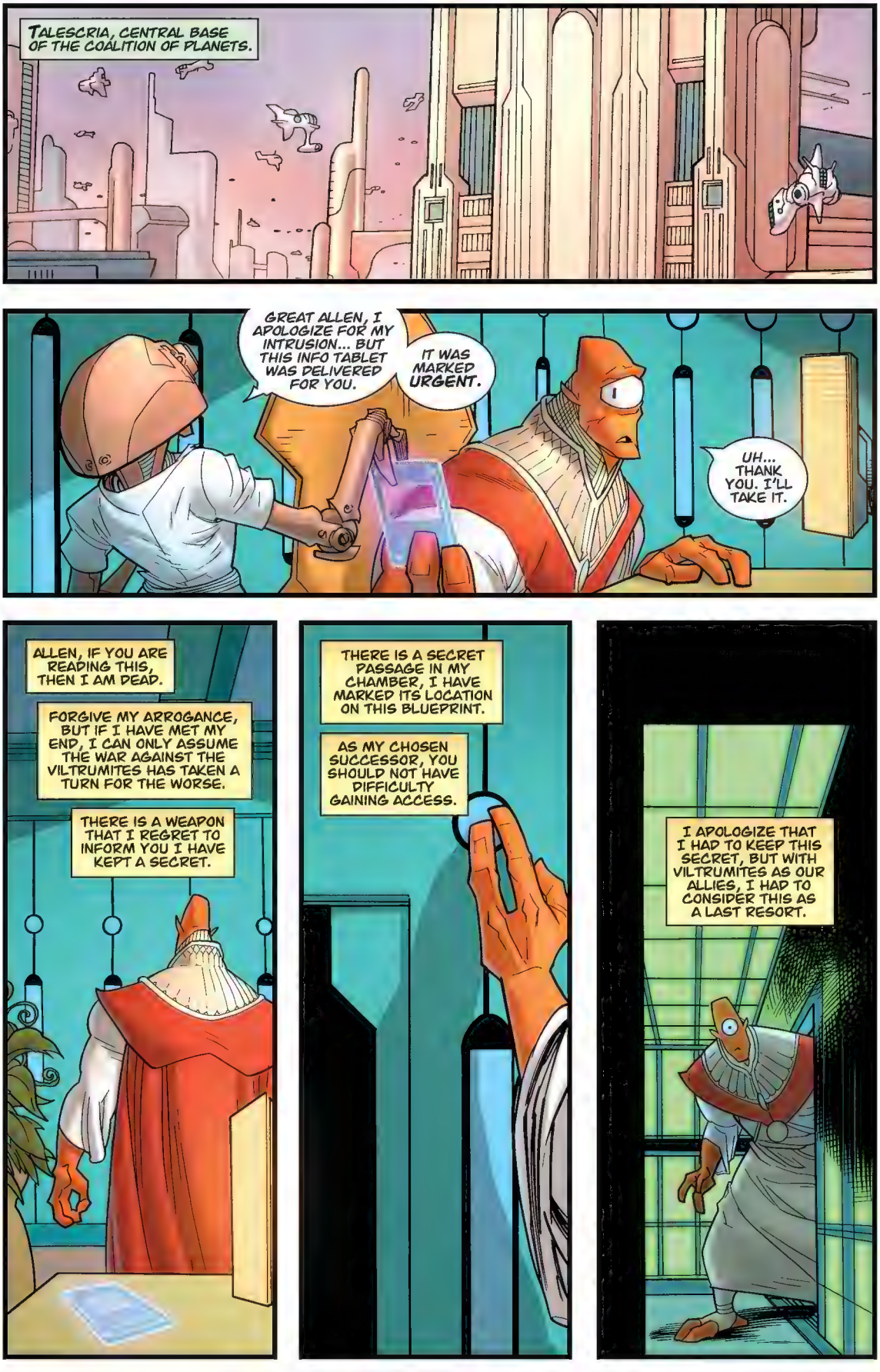
NO, DAMN IT!
I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!
DEBBIE, PLEASE--


I CAN NEVER TAKE BACK WHAT I DID TO YOU. I UNDERSTAND THAT. ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT I WAS MISGUIDED... LOST... THERE WERE SO MANY EMOTIONS... CONFLICTING THOUGHTS...
I HAD THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF BELIEFS TO OVERCOME, YOU HAVE TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND...
NO!
I DON'T HAVE TO UNDERSTAND A GODDAMN THING! YOU RUINED MY LIFE, YOU SON OF A BITCH!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?!
YOU RUINED--!!
...
I JUST WISH...
I WISH EVERYTHING COULD GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE...
NO.
THINGS WILL NEVER GO BACK TO THE WAY THEY WERE...
...BECAUSE I WILL NEVER LIE TO YOU AGAIN.


I GOTTA GO TO WORK, BYE! WOULDN'T WANT TO GET BETWEEN YOU TWO, ANYWAY.
BYE, RICK. LOVE YOU!
THAT EXPLAINS SO MUCH ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP.
RUBIX CUBAN
BEHAVE.
SO HE'S BACK FROM SPACE AND HE HASN'T EVEN COME TO SEE ME. TYPICAL.
HE JUST GOT BACK LIKE... HOURS AGO. HE JUST CAME TO SEE ME, I'M SURE HE'LL GET TO YOU.
HE WANTED TO GO SEE HOW HIS MOM WAS DOING... SHE'S SPENDING TIME WITH HIS DAD. MARK SAYS HE'S A GOOD PERSON, BUT... I JUST CAN'T BE AROUND THAT MAN.
IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE.
DID YOU TELL HIM?
WILLIAM, I--
...I DON'T KNOW HOW.

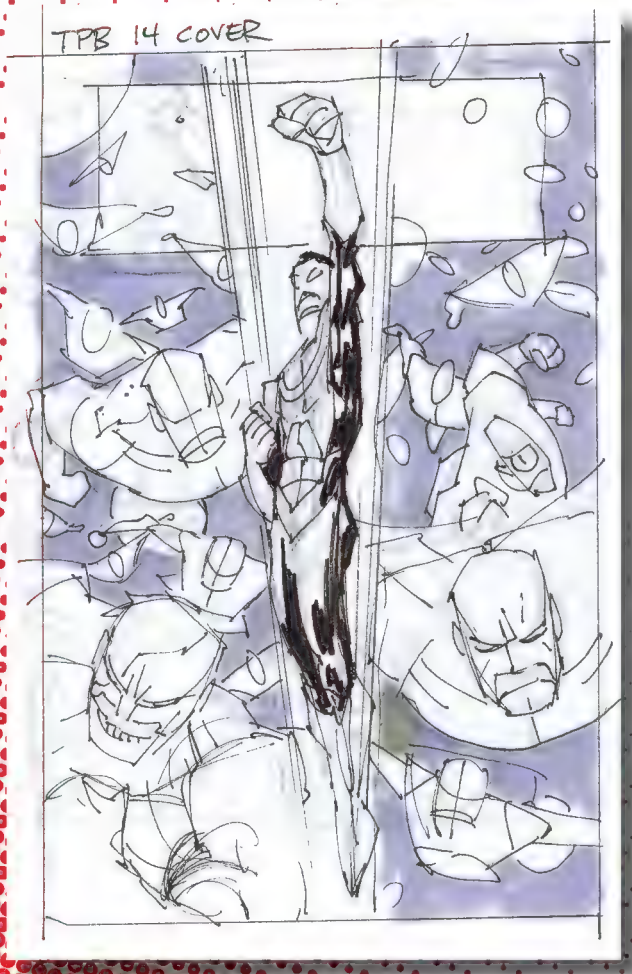


I KILLED CONQUEST.
WE DESTROYED VILTRUM.
WE ENDED THE VILTRUM EMPIRE.
...
BUT NOW THEY'RE HERE...
THE WAR IS OVER...
...BUT WE DIDN'T WIN.


TALESCRIA, CENTRAL BASE OF THE COALITION OF PLANETS.
GREAT ALLEN, I APOLOGIZE FOR MY INTRUSION... BUT THIS INFO TABLET WAS DELIVERED FOR YOU.
IT WAS MARKED URGENT.
UH... THANK YOU. I'LL TAKE IT.
ALLEN, IF YOU ARE READING THIS, THEN I AM DEAD.
FORGIVE MY ARROGANCE, BUT IF I HAVE MET MY END, I CAN ONLY ASSUME THE WAR AGAINST THE VILTRUMITES HAS TAKEN A TURN FOR THE WORSE.
THERE IS A WEAPON THAT I REGRET TO INFORM YOU I HAVE KEPT A SECRET.
THERE IS A SECRET PASSAGE IN MY CHAMBER, I HAVE MARKED ITS LOCATION ON THIS BLUEPRINT.
AS MY CHOSEN SUCCESSOR, YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE DIFFICULTY GAINING ACCESS.
I APOLOGIZE THAT I HAD TO KEEP THIS SECRET, BUT WITH VILTRUMITES AS OUR ALLIES, I HAD TO CONSIDER THIS AS A LAST RESORT.

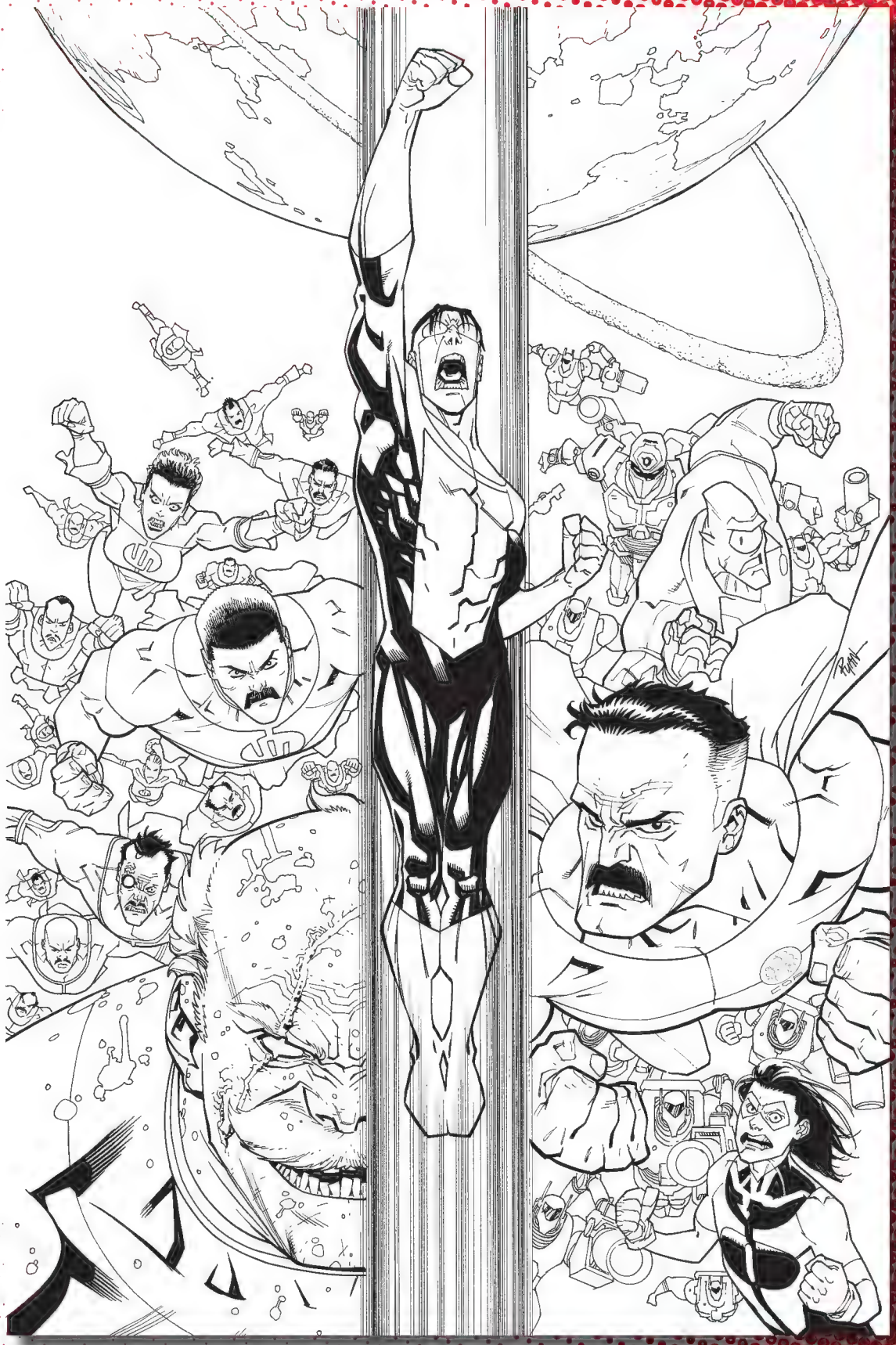
THE SCOURGE VIRUS.
THE VIRUS THAT RAVAGED THE VILTRUMITE POPULATION... NEARLY KILLED THEM ALL.
THIS IS A STRONGER STRAIN, PERFECTED... IT WILL NOT FAIL THIS TIME.
IF THE WAR EFFORT APPEARS LOST, I URGE YOU TO USE IT... IGNORE YOUR ATTACHMENT TO OUR VILTRUMITE ALLIES.
FOR THE GOOD OF THE UNIVERSE.
ERADICATE ALL VILTRUM LIFE... FOREVER.
WHATEVER YOU DO, MAKE CERTAIN THAT I DID NOT DIE IN VAIN. -THAEDUS.

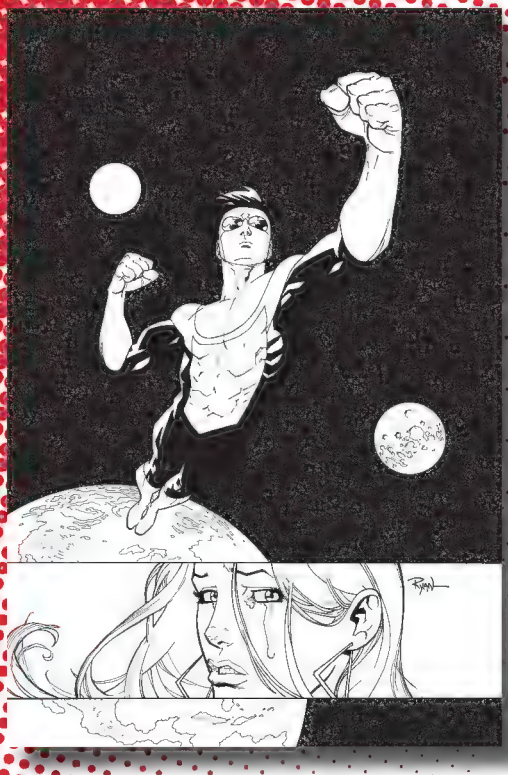
SKETCHBOOK



ROBERT KIRKMAN: The volume 14 TPB cover--yowza, Ryan Ottley does it again. I must say, I really love the TPB covers for this series--they're always cool. Ryan always does a great job of keeping the style consistent while also keeping it fresh and original from volume to volume and the art is always just top notch. I think Ryan really shines on these covers; he's so great, and... what--did you expect this commentary to be something other than me complimenting Ryan? Sorry.

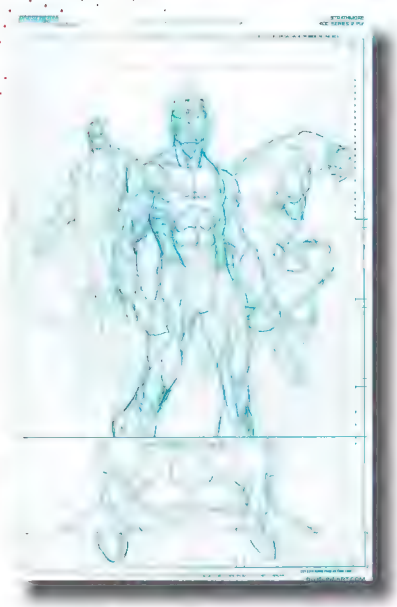
RYAN OTTLEY: *Never apologize for complimenting me. It's offensive. Now apologize for apologizing. But thank you, this cover has been said to be Invincible flying up a waterfall which would be awesome if he was. Space waterfall! In my defense, it does look more like water in the colors, something I didn't notice. But oh well, the colors are awesome, FCO rocks! And I normally don't print my prelim "thinking" pages because they are normally even less coherent than what you see here. This has enough where you can see some of my thought process behind the layout of the cover. Those come first, then the thumbnail sketch, then layouts, pencils, and inks! Comics!*

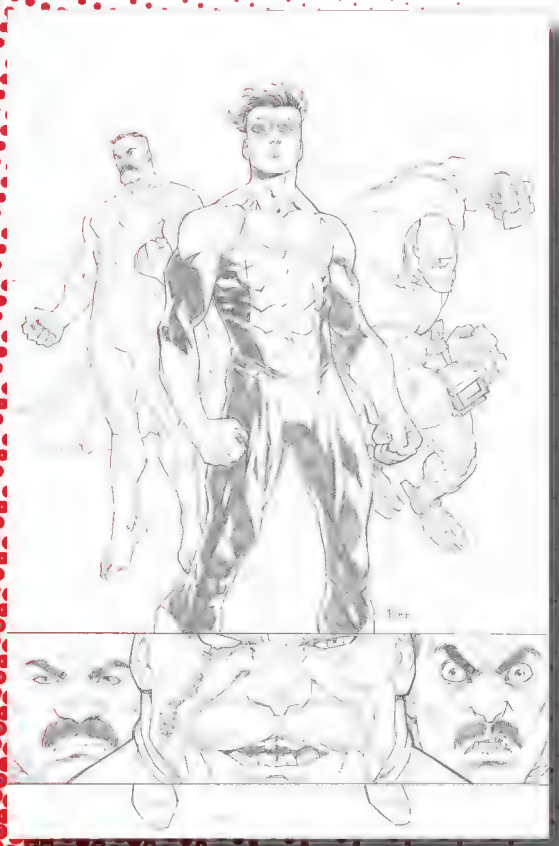


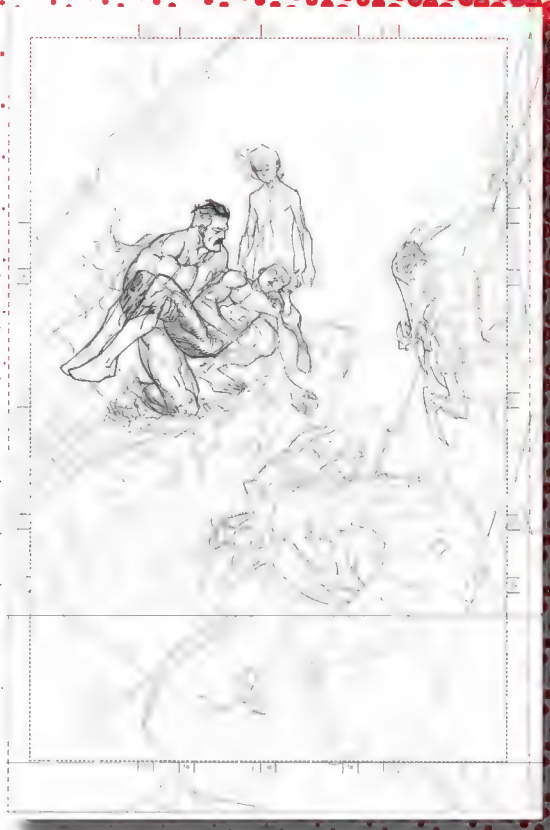


KIRKMAN: The covers for issue 71 and 72. For the Viltrumite War storyline (which allowed us to use the title of my favorite sitcom ever for the name of this TPB) I really wanted to do some kind of unified cover design that would make the whole story arc link together visually. So I stole a page from our TPB cover designs and suggested to Ryan that we slap a wide panel across the bottom of all the covers and show two scenes per cover instead of one. And of course Ryan took the idea and spun it into gold.

***OTTLEY:** The Viltrumite War arc! Funniest sitcom ever. The wide panel made laying out a cover even more of a challenge since I had to pay attention to where I place the main image along with the panel. Fun stuff. And for issue 72 cover, I got one of my favorite inkers to ink it, Dexter Vines. Thanks, Dexter!*

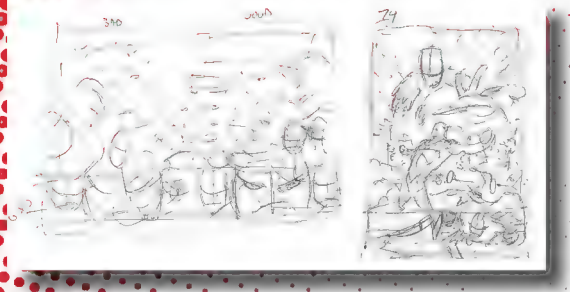


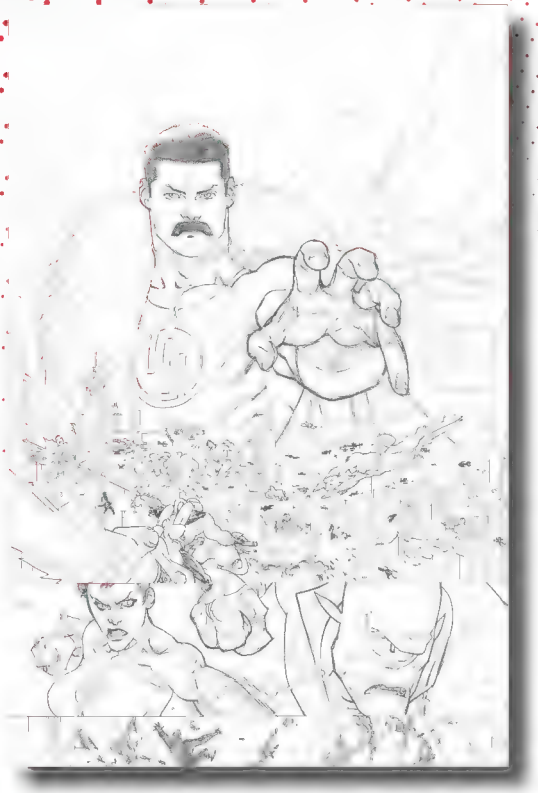


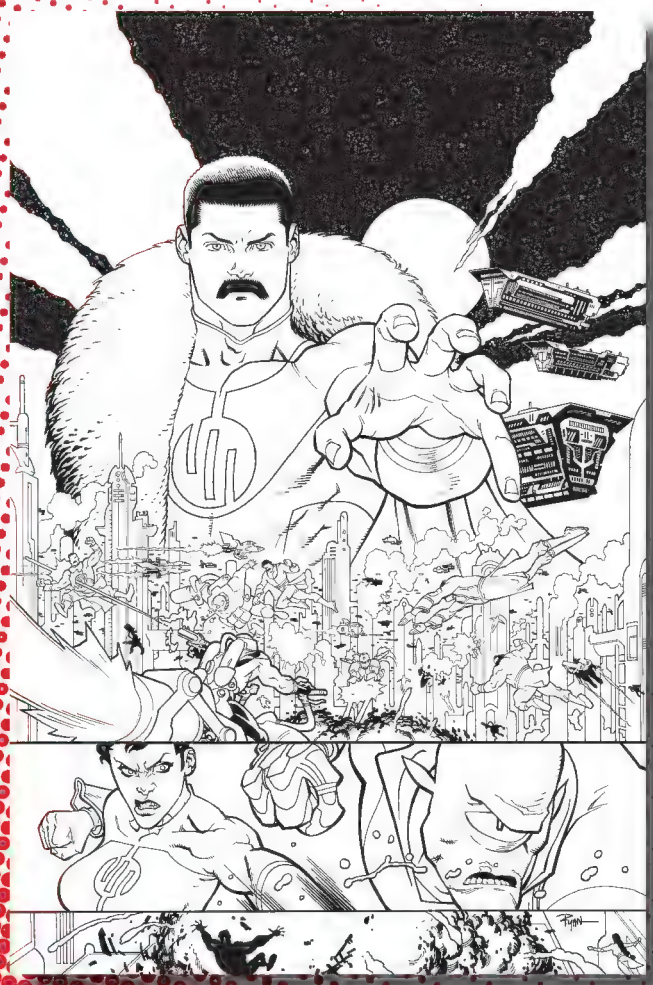


KIRKMAN: The cover to issue 73, you can't go wrong with having your main character near death on a cover. Boy, do we love going to that well. It always looks so cool!

OTTLEY: You look cool.





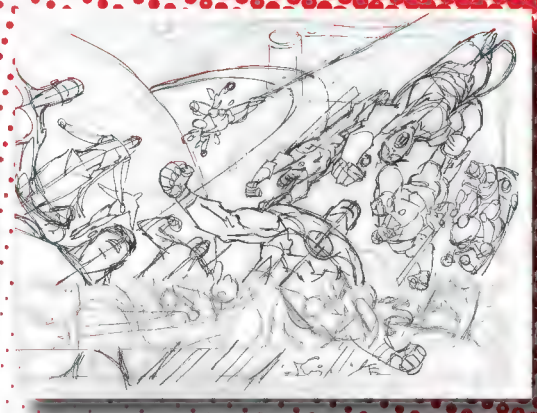


KIRKMAN: I really wanted to have one of those Doctor Doom-style, big villain with an outstretched hand lording over our heroes type cover. The kind that Erik Larsen does so well. Great shot of Anissa in the wide panel, too. Gotta say, this cover is sweet, but it's really kind of impossible to color well and make it not look like a rainbow. I really have to give FCO credit for being able to make this cover look so good in color. That guy's got talent.

OTTLEY: Yeah, FCO really did a great job, it was a tough one to handle and he nailed it. I think this is where the Freddy Mercury comments REALLY started rolling in. I still get asked at conventions if he was based on him. I need to put up a sign or something with a giant NO on it that I can point at when people ask. But hey, Cory designed Thragg, so we should really ask him. Where is Cory? CORY! Hey there, was Thragg based on the singer for Queen?

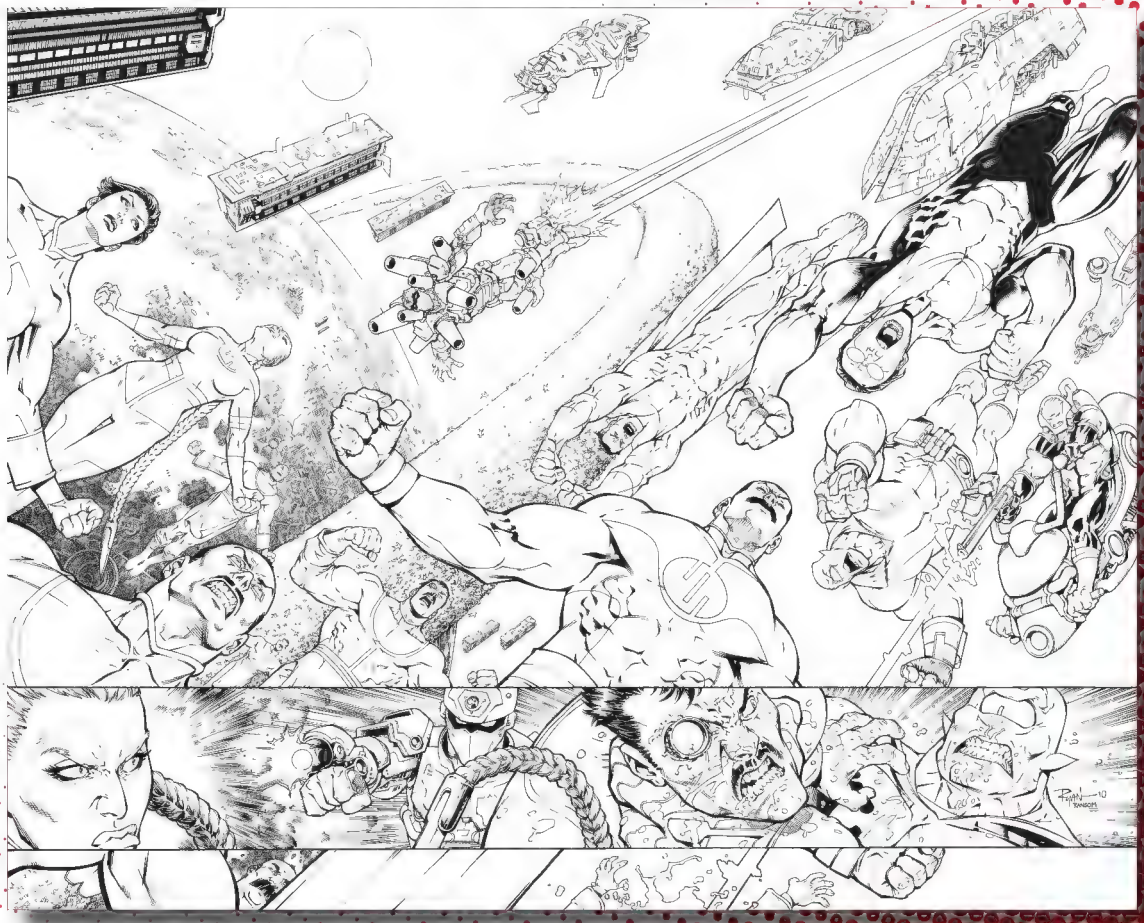
CORY WALKER: No! Are you kidding?!

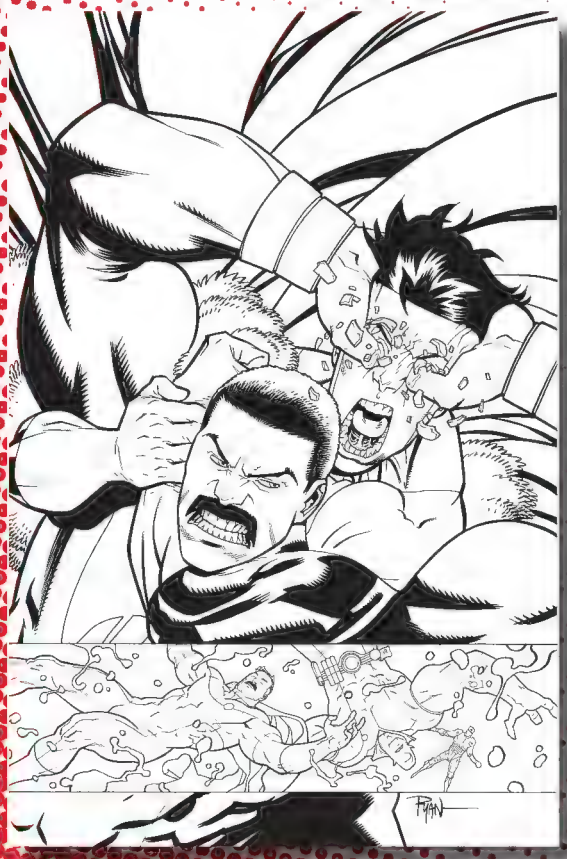
OTTLEY: I love you, Cory.



KIRKMAN: So for the cover of issue 75, we decided to do something special. Wraparound covers are fun, right? And we wanted to do the whole bad guys on one side, good guys on the other thing--but when you do that as a wraparound sometimes it makes the covers pretty bland when you look at them in halves. The front half could have just been Invincible and the rest looking really angrily over at the book next to it on the stack. That's not very friendly. Eventually Ryan came up with a layout that worked! Whew!

***OTTLEY:** Yeah, at first I was going for the quicker version which was just bad guys on one side, good on the other. It was a bit bland and it's been done to death by other companies. But we wanted this cover to shine so I chose a much harder layout but it was a lot of fun squeezing in the planet and ring of bodies, space ships, and all that fun stuff. Took more time, but was worth it. I normally ink my own covers but I really needed to get going on the issue and I was having fun getting others to ink a couple covers so I thought I'd ask Mike Ransom Getty, artist of Guarding the Globe to ink this for me. The guy is master with that brush! Thanks, Ransom!*





KIRKMAN: Another thing I wanted to do in commemoration of the anniversary 75th issue was have a cool redraw of the first issue's cover. I thought it would be a cool thing to show the differences in the book from then to now by having the image redrawn. We actually gave this variant cover away free to retailers as a thank you for all the support they've given this title over the years. And then there's the cover to 76--ouch--poor Invincible!

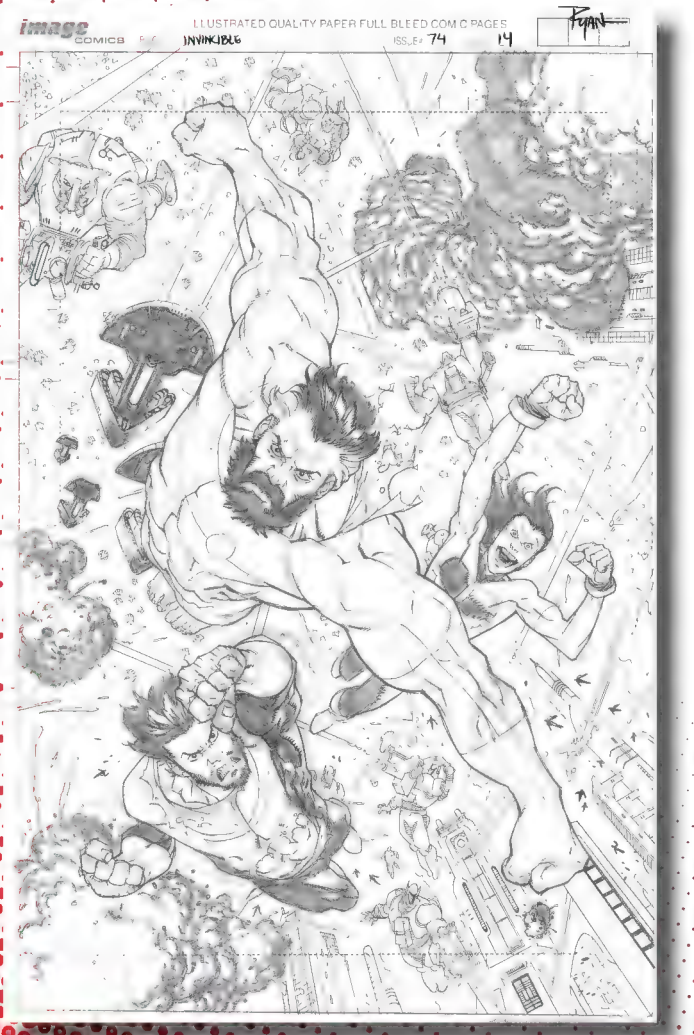
OTTLEY: *I really need to pick up writing. I'd love to say "Hey for this month's issue 75 spectacular you need to draw a double-page cover with everyone on it, an issue the size of TWO issues with more figures per page than you've ever drawn before. OH, and a variant cover, and do it all in a month, GO!" And then I would just sit back and laugh.*

KIRKMAN: The covers for issues 77 and 78--what a cool couple of covers. I love the issue 77 cover. I really wanted to have a cover that would mislead audiences into thinking there was going to be a knock-down-drag-out fight on Earth between Invincible and the Viltrumites! I love setting fans up for a let down. On the cover to 78, hot damn can Ryan draw clouds or what? And the coloring on this cover is just amazing.

OTTLEY: That 77 cover was inked by none other than the awesome Tim Townsend. It was so great to work with another one of my favorite inkers of all time. I'm really happy with how the cover turned out. The panel for the cover to 78 was difficult to compose because I needed to fit them in with a kissing close-up, but that panel was hard to work around so it looks kind of funny--like I'm censoring Eve's butt or something. I apologize to all of you fans of Eve's bum.

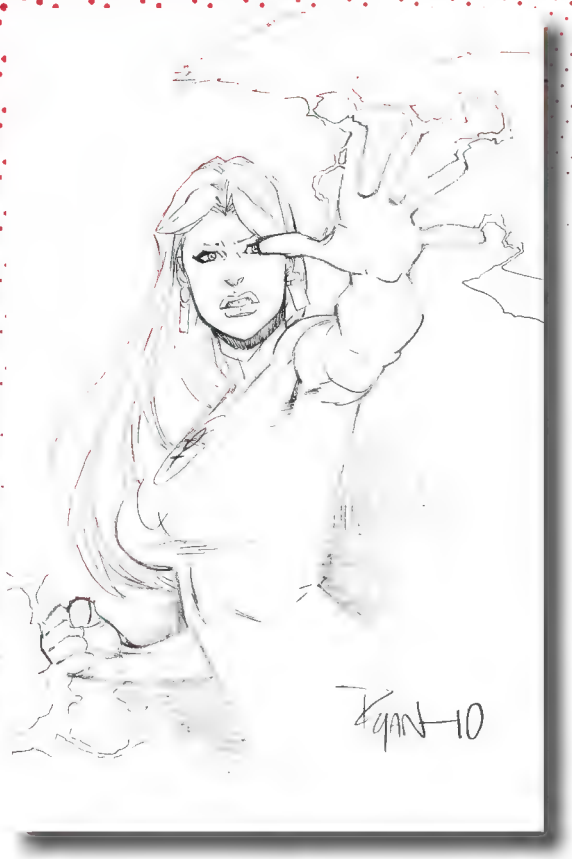
KIRKMAN: If there's one shortcoming I can admit to in this Viltrumite War storyline... it's that I wanted to focus on the Viltrumites much more... I wanted to show things from their side from time to time, really get into the nuts and bolts of their society and really develop the personalities of Viltrumites like Anissa and Kregg and Thragg and others... but I just ran out of room. Ryan did some cool Viltrumite designs though...

***OTTLEY:** Luckily we still have hundreds more issues in front of us so you can still work out all those nuts and bolts. We got time, and TONS of room! Let's do this. I know I would LOVE to see/draw more Viltrumite stories.*



KIRKMAN: This series ran pretty late during this storyline. We hit a point where we either had to start taking shortcuts or just let the schedule go off the rails... I said schedule be damned, this is a story we've been building to for years, let's do it right. So that's why there are so many two-page spreads like the ones you see on this page... AMAZING.

OTTLEY: *Issue 75 alone took 2 months to draw. Which makes sense because it was the size of two issues, and of course packed with so many war scenes. I remember you had this idea for a while, for me to draw 4 double-page spreads. I thought you were just exaggerating. Funny thing is, you weren't, and it ended up being 6. But I agree, schedule be damned. I'm happy with how it turned out! Sometimes you gotta do an epic issue even if it's late.*



KIRKMAN: Find Ryan at a convention--get awesome sketches like the ones pictured on this page.

KIRKMAN: Or even awesomer sketches like these. Lord... Ryan, I'm sorry for all the zombie Invincibles you have to draw at these conventions. I feel like that's my fault.

OTTLEY: *It is your fault. But you know I love drawing zombies, right? So I'm totally fine with them. You ever need another Walking Dead back-up story you know where to find me. ;)*

KIRKMAN: That's it for us folks, thanks for buying!

OTTLEY: *Thank you all! And thanks to Robert for being an awesome writer, co-worker, and friend. Same to Cliff and FCO, thanks for making me look pretty. I got the coolest job.*

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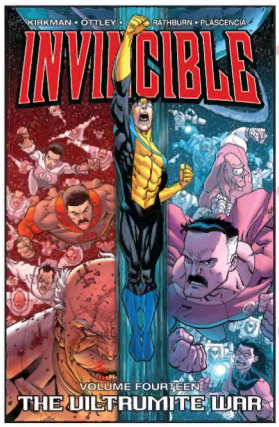

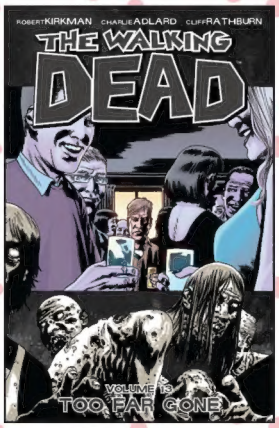

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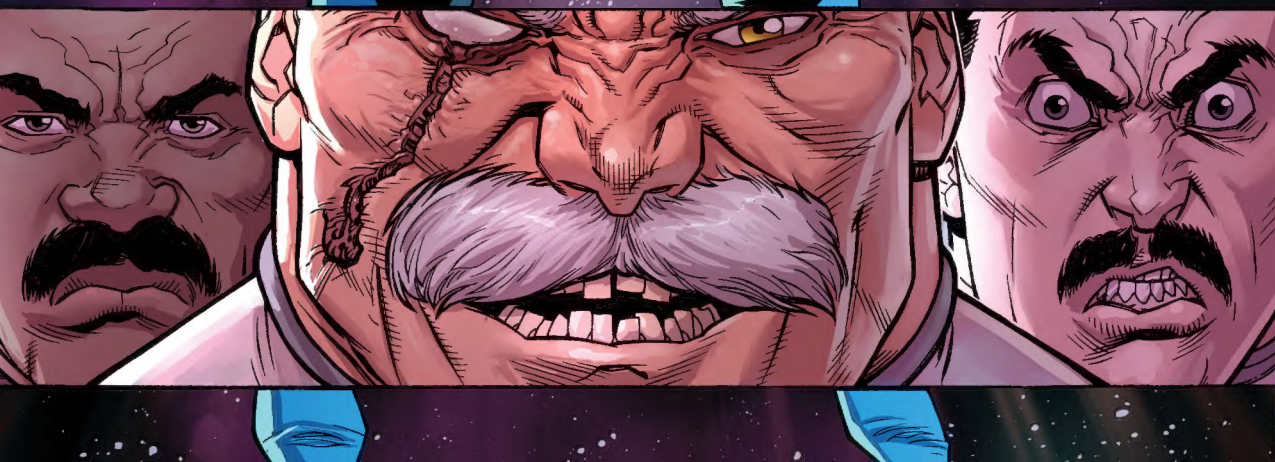

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